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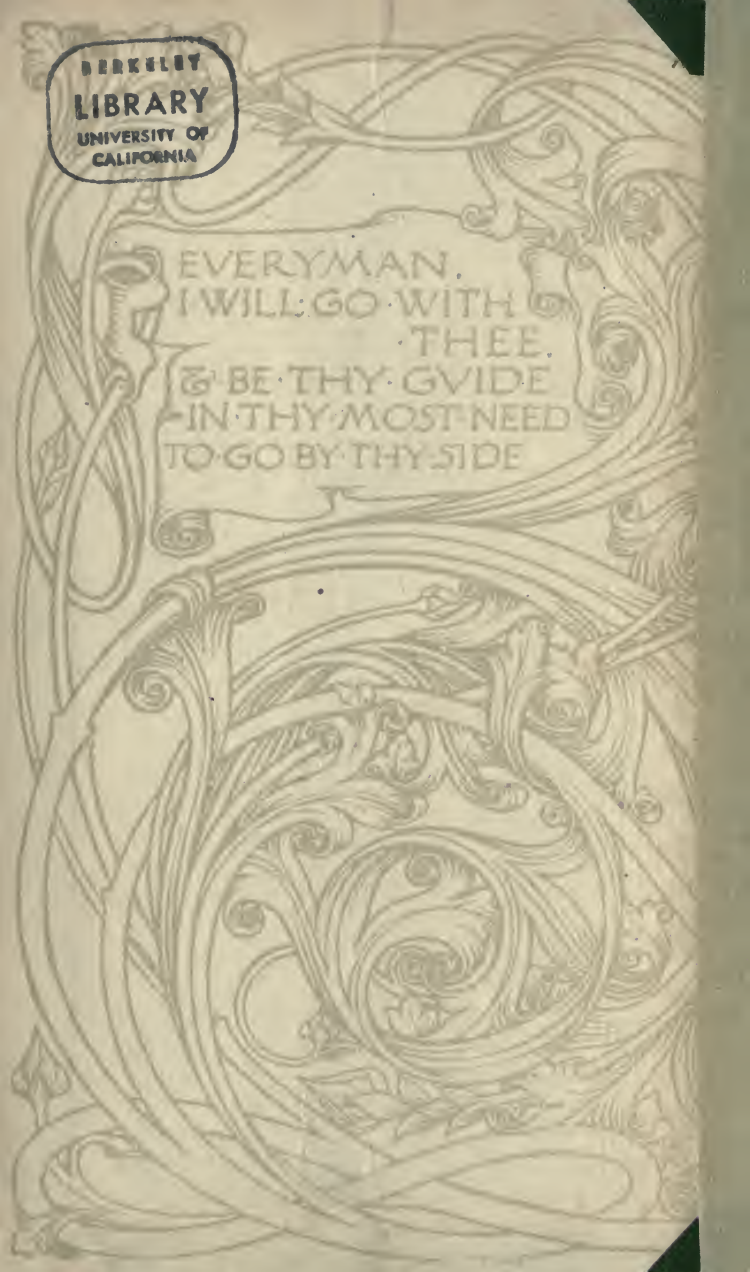

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THREE PLAYS
BY FREDERIC HEBBEL
INTRODUCTION BY L. H. ALLEN

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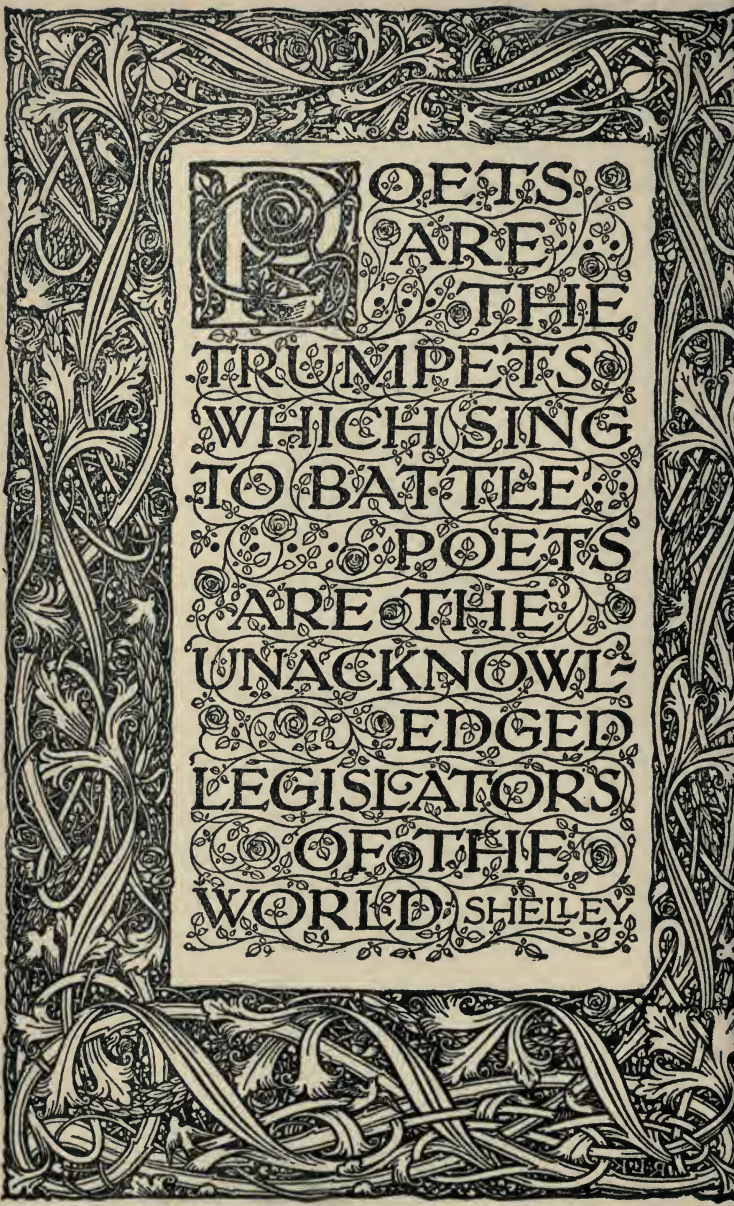
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THREE PLAYS by FREDERIC HEBBEL

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INTRODUCTION

If a stringent quality be noticeable in Hebbel, it can well be traced to his early environment. The greater ills which strike the manhood into human nature are drastic godsends; but the long draw of poverty, the depressing atmosphere of dour faces, the helpless baffle of young and ignorant art "made tongue-tied with authority"—it is these things that in a sensitive nature are prone to twist strength into rancour. Luckily this was not the effect on Hebbel, but in the caustic, if honest, introspection, the rigid or hesitant self-examinings, the loathing of poverty and uncongenial work that was almost a panic, in these things whose excess tends to stunt the energy, the bane of Hebbel's early years is seen. Nothing more can be said for his great stature than that through all his miseries he won his way to a mature confidence and mellow resignation.

He was born in 1813, a Dittmarscher, the son of a mason. There is in that sea-coast blood something of an ancient savagery, a kinship with grey skies and seas, yet a power under strong control. To this he owed his sharp directness of speech, and to his peasanthood a raw facing of unvarnished things that was to stand him in good stead in his future war on faddists and dilettanti. Yet these resultant goods helped little in his early strife. A snapper-up of unconsidered trifles in education, destined by his father for masonry, at fourteen a petty clerk "set to feed with grooms," derided by his master for crude effusions in the local weekly, and no doubt soundly trounced for a malcontent cub, suffering this for twenty-two years, the sensitive young thinker might well have wondered which was out of joint, himself or the time. It was not till a Hamburg authoress, Amelia Schoppe, struck by his writing, invited him to Hamburg, that his restricted nature began to expand—yet under difficulties. His patroness advised

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him to make a crutch of law and a walking-stick of poetry, to which end she made him the pensioner of a well-intentioned clique. It was a gigantic task for an ill-equipped boy to make up the yawning gaps in systematic education: it was worse to bury himself in constitutional niceties; and, most unkindest cut, to eat the bread of dependence. The Northern stubbornness bristled at this last; and it was intolerable to be admitted as a favoured guest into a banal society where literature was pasteurised. There he ruffled some honest brows by boldly affirming that Kleist was superior to Körner.

Even thus young he was bound to speak his mind, and it is precisely those minds that take boldness as an unavoidable pang which suffer under introspection. Truth to oneself is good in the sanctum, but awkward in the parlour, expulsion from which sets one, in his drifting loneliness, grasping at the first straw. Thus it was that Hebbel sought a doubtful balm in the love of Elise Lensing.

She seems to have been one of those pliant natures that cannot live without an idol. Tender, affectionate, brave, but no mental stimulus—there is the tragedy. A German is essentially a thinker. His inner world is the camera obscura for the outer, with this consequence, that a woman is to him intellectually nothing at all. Hebbel, to whom intellect was vital, in the weak hour when that intellect itself was in question, sought refuge in emotional fellowship—not love; he did not pretend it. For some years he tried, no doubt with that agony of hesitation endured by Shelley, to act up to his sense of chivalry. But "self-consciousness" and "self-development" are the besetting virtues of the German. The homely housewife could not hold him, that portrayer of strong characters felt integral necessity for some positive, dominant quality of soul that could share his own expansion.

This, however, is anticipating. The gallant Elise, self-sacrificial to the point of becoming mother without being wife, for some years devoted her help, pecuniary if not intellectual, to furthering her lover's, or rather her beloved's, success. From 1836-1839 he studied in Heidelberg and Munich, ostensibly law, though extracting far more from history and philosophy. Always at daggers drawn with

poverty. eking out his Brötchen and Kaffee with little appreciated journalism, he felt he was now against stark issues. Here his Northern nature was his ally. When against verities he was indomitable; and henceforth the question—"Shall I write from the inner or the outer necessity?" could receive only one answer.

From his travels he gained little. His Germanism needed no accentuation, and his desultory studies had tended to make him an introspective browser. His angularity and bitterness, together with his imperious cry for individualism, came out now in the *Judith*. It was a harum-scarum crudity, yet marked with strange flashes of genius. Judith was to be the forerunner of such an imperial type as Mariamne; but one cannot help feeling the pig-tail beneath the helmet of righteousness; and the gigantesque Holofernes, though he roar like a Bull of Bashan, is apt to give the impression that Judith after all cut off a property head. Many Germans appear to admire this play, but it seems to less Teutonic eyes like an aimless piston. Certainly we are not marching in the fields of Thrasymene, and the reader will not be disappointed if he wants Marlowe's luridness out-Marlowed. Yet withal there is something craggy and storm-enduring amid the ferocity, and one realises that real anguish is revealing itself by intermittent lightnings.

Fretted by penury and hope deferred, Hebbel now conceived a wild design. The Duke of Holstein, his own duchy, was Christian VIII of Denmark. On such a man he had a claim and could be proud as well as suppliant. To Denmark he went, at first with little success. The prospect of a chair of Aesthetics at Kiel opened only to close. He now felt in extremities, when the Danish poet Oehlenschlager gave him a timely appreciation and recommended him to the King: with the result that he received a meagre viaticum for two years' travel.

"Thus we half-men struggle," says Browning. But the whole men struggle more. It is their misfortune to be world-useful in one thing, world-useless in all others. In them their art is not a choice but a condition of existence, without giving the means of existence. What then this pittance meant to one who for two years was relieved of the necessity of earning a livelihood, only men like himself can

realise. Not an opening of great avenues; they always stretch to the imagination; but an end to stolen moments in them, the coming of delightful hauntings of them, and the steady concentration on some mastering thought.

To Hebbel it meant more, in that he chose Paris for a great part of his stay. Its grey atmospheres and meditative buildings, its blue skies, and above all, its childlike unrestraint were an admirable corrective to the long constriction of necessity and the Teutonic *Grübelei*. In Paris no two clocks agree. In Germany they are fatally accurate. There is the difference in a nutshell. The best good that might befall Hebbel at this period was to forget to wind up his watch. His warm words about Paris and his regretful departure thence showed that the Teuton had loved the geniality of the Frank. Yet, strange to say, at this period he produced *Maria Magdalena*—yet not strange to say; for like Lucretius' gazer at the storm from land, Hebbel could write of the bitter peasant-life with a relief, for the nonce at least, that it was over. Perhaps, too, the death of his little son Mark, whereby his stay in Paris was threatened, gave his thoughts a gloomy caste. At all events it would be hard to find a more unrelieved atmosphere of misery than in this play—not that subtle Ibsenesque clutch of Fate, but a hard realism whose lines are burnt in with acid. Unwilling to follow out the regulation sorrows of peasant-maidens and noble seducers, Hebbel keeps this tragedy of the *bourgeoisie* entirely in its own atmosphere. This, his express aim, was good in itself, for the gallant noble has too often been made an example of gaudy and melodramatic sin. It is more powerful to show that a pusillanimous clerk's sordid love-affair involves tragic issues. The more closely to knit this tragedy to its own atmosphere, the ruin of the girl has been set against the problem of paternal authority. The effect of terror is worked less by the self-slain daughter than by the still living father, who has in him a sort of stupid grandeur, one whose ideas the blacksmith traditions of his class had cast in iron. With a son mismanaged and a daughter dead through these metallic good intentions, he cries dazedly, "I understand the world no longer!" It is the terrible "I want the sun!" given in more manful tones, for with

all his obtuseness, he has in him the Roman solemnity of a father's powers and duties.

The drama was published, but refused by the Berliner Hoftheater, and indeed it now looked as if his retrospect were to become forecast. With the *Maria Magdalena* was published an essay on the then conditions of the drama, a treatise that made him determined enemies. This fruitless toil for the time embittered him, but his money was not yet exhausted and he went to prolong his dreams in Rome, where the acquaintance with several men of high talent did much to deepen him.

In 1845 he was ready to return to Germany; but during his sojourn abroad the slow shadows of his love-crisis had been creeping on him. Two years of uninterrupted thought had brought an expansion of mind incalculable to one who lived in the intellectual. He was now grown up, conscious of power, and alas, Elise was not grown up. Now she called to him, unable to bear the separation longer; and thereby he was placed in the necessity of decision. No palterer with himself, he refused compromise. He was to choose between an absorber of and a compeer in his ideals. There is no need for harrowing psychology. He chose the latter; let those who blame him acknowledge at least his truth to himself. Let this be said—in later years when Elise had lost her second child, he invited her to his house and made her acquainted with his wife, at whose instance the invitation came. "You have not borne children!" she cried when he hesitated, and in those words she revealed the sympathy which made her so great an actress. Between these two women there grew up a warm friendship—a thing impossible if somewhere in all this there was not a noble element. Let us rather accept it in the spirit of *Aglavaine and Selysette*, than with the rigid sneer of Arnold at Shelley for proposing the same thing to Harriet. These were the words which Elise could afterwards write to Hebbel's wife—"That our relations could take so pure a colour I ascribe to my sojourn there (Vienna). Though so many hours of bitterness were my lot in that unforgettable town, things would never have shaped themselves thus had I not learned to know you and all the facts on the spot itself. Our bond is now one of those of whose like there are few."

It was from Vienna that Hebbel sent Elise his decision, and the variegated Southern capital was to be his home till his death. In 1846 he met Christine Enghausen, an actress of power and a warm admirer of his work. In this woman of feminine devotion and deep insight he found one who could foster his art as well as his nature. From their marriage began sweeter days for him. Her own earnings at the theatre relieved his immediate want; and it speaks the more for the proud man that he could take what was freely given with no sense of dependence. More than ever now he needed domestic happiness, for his relations with the Viennese were not of the best. He did not sympathise with their revolution or fall in with their polished manners. His own laconisms were hardly complimentary or attractive, and his strong Northern accent ruffled Southern ears. But with a noble wife at his side he could afford to be shut in on himself. It meant a grip on his thought-world and an absence of corrosive compromise. At this time there appeared *Julia*, *The Ruby*, and *A Tragedy in Sicily*. They show that for the time at least his equilibrium was upset by his estrangement from the outer world. It is hardly a reflection on contemporary taste that *Julia* was unappreciated. Berlin declared that it did not suit the public; Vienna had doubts as to its moral and aesthetic value. Any new and good art meets these objections, yet there are cases where they apply. It has a fantastic plot which finds a halting solution. Moral it is, as Hebbel sharply pointed out, but the " problem " is hardly thinkable, the motives are bizarre, and the turgid language betrays a straining mind. If no other point be taken, a comparison between the grim father in this play and that of *Maria Magdalena* will show that here he has substituted the remarkable for the terrible.

In *The Ruby* he essayed humour, a quality he lacked. The servants, for instance, in *Herod and Mariamne*, and the Persian in *Gyges*, make elephantine fun which depends rather on verbal antitheses than on genuine situation. In *The Ruby* he missed the fascinating topsy-turvydom of the fairy tale; and there is a certain oriental nonchalance of the wonderful which was quite outside his province.

These plays, however, were followed by *Herod and*

Mariamne, which left no doubt as to his genius, and proved that he had now found the power of creation in his own atmosphere. As has been said, there was now an increasing happiness in his domestic affairs, and the acquisition of a little property gave him the possessor's pride in tending a garden. But in exterior things a crash came in his fortunes. In 1849 Laube took over the management of the Vienna Hofburgtheater. His personal dislike of Hebbel reflected itself on his wife. He seems to have been quite unconvinced of Hebbel's dramatic genius and augured for him no lasting position. Certain of his plays had met with poor success and on this ground Laube cut out of the theatre programme *Judith* and *Maria Magdalena*, nor did he notice the dramas between 1850 and 1860. His position was frankly that a good drama should vindicate itself within two or three years from its first performance—a principle that means the condemnation of Hebbel. Yet even thus his injustice to Christine is not excused. "As far as concerns my wife," Hebbel writes, "Laube deprived her of her best rôles and did not give her a single new one. Indeed he forced her to play grandmothers and nurses. It is an attempt at moral murder, for an artist who must let her powers lie unused wears herself out consciously or unconsciously, and naturally loses in the process."

For Hebbel it seemed an *impasse*, but at this juncture Dingelstedt of Munich came to his rescue by performing *Judith* and *Agnes Bernauer*. In the latter, however, political faction in Munich found offence, alleging reflections on Bavarian royalty. When, therefore, the drama was forbidden, Dingelstedt seceded to Weimar, bringing out Hebbel's *Genoveva* in 1858, and in 1861 his *Nibelungen* triology.

It meant the poet's final triumph. The Court of Weimar, anxious to maintain its cultural traditions, and keen enough to recognise a man of genius, offered him residence among the memories of Goethe and Schiller, and the last year of his life (1863) was crowned by the bestowal of the position of Privat-Bibliothekar to the Grand Duke of Sachs-Weimar.

The offer of residence at Weimar he refused, being now no longer young and thoroughly habilitated at Vienna. He

had outlived any mad quest of fame, had reached an inner assurance, and could rest content with the knowledge that his work would be his monument. Spending his last days in quiet reading, and meditating on the philosophy of Kant, he met his last illness prepared and happy. His wife survived him many years, and is indeed but recently dead. Her earlier bitterness was sweetened by the assurance of the increasing regard for her husband throughout Germany.

The personality of the man was almost a penalty paid to his art. He was no lover of strife for its own sake, not rancoured against individuals, no conscious doctrinaire in conversation, and brief of speech. Yet he had so forceful a conviction that it was difficult for him to make lasting friends. Without his own will he so impressed others with his decisive habit of mind, an effect heightened by his short and penetrating speech, that independent, if lesser, minds felt they must avoid him for their own salvation. He was German to the core, and the best qualities of his nation are a profundity and strength that is good for our craggy moods. The elusive subtlety of the Frenchman is not his, but Siegfrieds are not made of the rarer lights and shadows. So eminent in these qualities is Hebbel that Germany is now asking if she has not in him her greatest poet since Goethe.

This is a question that cannot be answered hurriedly, but at least it may be said that no poetic dramatist since Goethe expressed so deep or consistent a conviction about art. The creator in him only stimulated the critic, and his various treatises show that his dramas have been built on deep foundations. Two things most impressed him about humanity, first the individual will, secondly the relation of the unit to the whole. Tragedies arise not from the direction of the will, as Christianity would have it, but from the will itself, the "obstinate extension of the individuality." Deed and circumstance are the outward expressions of will and necessity, and it is primarily with these outward expressions that drama has to do. Through these dynamic means it interprets the static abstraction, and though the comprehension of the latter is the main end of drama, yet it must work within its own limits. It is this mingling of Being with Becoming that makes the artist problem difficult.

Hebbel thus recognised art as symbolic, but unlike the symbolists he made the character himself the symbol. The tragic figure, at once the instrument and agent, is his own problem. When Dr. Heiberg, adversely criticising Hebbel, announced that the drama of the future would subordinate the character to the problem, Hebbel trenchantly condemned the prophecy. Out of Heiberg's own country arose Ibsen to vindicate the poet. It is the decline from Ibsen's art that has emasculated his followers. The Shaws and Galsworthys create their characters out of their problems. It will make no drama, as Hebbel foresaw. Treated by the prosaic mind it will become a sermon; the idealist like Maeterlinck may make of it pure poetry, but neither of these are, in the true sense, drama.

Hebbel further considered that since dramatic art must involve the static with the dynamic, it necessitates certain modifications as opposed to real life. If the enduring is to be expressed, art must round the circle of Fate, whereas Life itself is a dubious thing, whose individual meaning may lie in the history of its generation. The whole then is expressed by the selection of significant parts, or as he himself expresses it, by an exaggeration of the detached. From this it follows that drama is more self-conscious than life. This is why, especially in Shakespeare, the characters are more self-conscious than they would be in reality. They become the centre-point of Fate, not merely by the action of the play but by their own foreboding and introspection. This is, however, to be reconciled with a living humanity, so that the mental processes are natural, if intensified. Added to this, in dramatic crises, the word comes straight before or after the deed, so that both are significantly linked to the principle. Any of Shakespeare's tragic heroes will show the truth of this reflection. The classic drama, which fixed one mighty moment in a process, needed exposition rather than introspection, situation rather than development. But the dynamic element, on which Hebbel insisted, and which he found in Shakespeare, makes crucial the growth of the individual, as well as his will-attitude.

In short, the self-consciousness of art makes situations psychologic as well as actual, yet not, as with Browning, positing the psychology as an end in itself. This atmo-

sphere, in which the character assumes a slightly exaggerated contemplative attitude, never obscures him.

Psychology brings in a third element, that of the poet's own mind. Hebbel differed from realists proper in regarding sheer objectivity as impossible. Exterior mental processes must be strained through the poet's own experience, and hence partake of his personality. Even if complete self-detachment were impossible, art existed for the expression of the poet's own being. This applies as well to the material of drama. Neither actions of men nor events in time exist objectively. For this reason he called history "the deposit of time;" only the permanent elements left by the ages are history and the poet's sphere is not the reproduction of events but the interpolation of their atmosphere. Following these tenets, Hebbel set himself to embrace the three main currents from which arise human problems—the historic, social and philosophic. In some he attempted to unite all three, in others he touched a single aspect. It was a gigantic task only partially fulfilled, but his greatest work has vindicated him.

Since Goethe there has not existed, in the field of poetic drama, so powerful an individuality, nor one so completely expressed. Schiller, being Goethe's contemporary, does not come into the comparison. Yet even he is more the vehicle of a movement than a great individual. When his art stands by itself it is little more than a wonderfully dexterous adaptation. His mastery of language and form cannot compensate for the lack of stamina in his character. In the lyric and idyllic lay his real bent, and his dramas tell more by the direction they gave the German tongue and literature than by their innate worth. No other could dispute with Hebbel but Kleist, who lacked, however, the power of self-facing, the only way to true self-effacement in art. In truth, Kleist had something of the prig in his composition. There is an avoidance of the ultimate in him which makes him shrill when intense and sentimental when human. Compare the tawdriness of Kleist's *Käthchen von Heildronn* with *Agnes Bernauer*, the greatest of Hebbel's prose dramas. In *Maria Magdalena* he had avoided portraying a conflict between the nobility and higher life; in *Julia* he had touched it from an entirely individual point,

one which could bring about no conflict of the classes. When in *Agnes Bernauer* he really essayed the problem, he crushed all sentimentalism and rigidly drew the tragedy to a brief and pitiless end. In the preface to *Maria Magdalena* Hebbel had declared that the union of a burgher-maiden with a prince was not tragic but pathetic. Tragic outcome must, in his eyes, be inevitable as death. For this reason he does not confine the story to a mere personal intrigue, but involves in it the whole fortune of a state. Innocent and lovely as the burgher-girl Agnes is, her marriage with the prince makes her mere existence her death-warrant, and the same necessity demands that the headstrong lover shall live and reign. Conflict between classes is, in a masterly way, resolved into the opposition of the State and the individual. Yet nowhere does the poet drift into abstract theory. The calm wisdom of the old Duke is as human and touching as the innocence of Agnes and the hot chivalry of her husband. That Hebbel was marching here with surer step is shown in the more clearly conceived scenes, the simpler language and the naturalness of the plot. Against this play Kleist's *Käthchen* betrays its melodrama the more strongly. In these two plays there is really the difference between the two men.

The *Nibelungen* trilogy will be regarded as Hebbel's crowning achievement. No doubt it is, but really to feel it you must have the soul of Teutonism in you. Hebbel was too concerned with the interplay of human motives to give the sheer pleasure of romantic atmosphere. One feels at times that nothing but the invigorating jar of their own old tongue can picture those strong-thewed and raven-helmeted ones. Hebbel has diminished the child-like largeness of these mythic figures by making them all too human. Nevertheless he has preserved the starkness of warriors and made his triology a monument of the German genius.

Here we may mention that his style, so eminently fitted for such subjects, suffers for its virtues. Form he has, but it is rather the swing of a whirlpool than the symmetry of a crystal. He could not glimpse a subject. Things were sucked into him with all their issues, and kept in their expression the traces of his pondering. He startles with antitheses and sharp epigrams which give at first the

impression of labour. They have in them none of the catchiness of half-thought brilliance, but just because they are the result of an intellectual thoroughness which had become integral, they have a cloudy effect which later resolves itself into the haze of deep perspective. His roughness of style, moreover, was not stumbled upon. The Dittmarscher may have been sharp and brusque in his own utterance, but he did not merely transfer his idiosyncrasies to his characters. In his essay *On the Style of Drama*, he declares that speech is a living product of the folk, and that only within these limits can the individual modify it. He was repelled as much by the music-monger as by the overwrought intellectual. When music comes, it is the idea self-born in symmetry, not an arrangement of prettily coaxed words. The intellectual cumulation of images, toilsomely hunted out, he dubs a " Chinese lantern hung by a bankrupt near a gray abstraction." That he loved the natural music of words can well enough be seen from his sonnets; but he claims that the most emotional situations in drama demand sharp daggers of speech. If one, like Maeterlinck, seeks for these moments the highest utterances of all, silence, he kills drama, even if it re-arises in poetry. Dealing as Hebbel does with the most human of characters he claims that crises are confused, curt, and even savage. In the relation of episodes he favours the sonorous roll; but in the portrayal of characters, especially in crises, he asserts that there are sudden reversals of feeling, rips in the thread of thought, hidden things projected by a single word—things that necessitate roughness of metre, complexity and confusion of the period and contradiction of images. The fight for expression is itself expression; he declares that what is undeft is often passionate. Not always, however, has he reached his effect. Though his style is not mannerism it can become a monotony of sharpness. He was apt to forget that there can be an intensity of quiet and tragic significance, not always in broken utterances, but in a commonplace.

It is often the same with his psychology. The non-success of *Herod and Mariamne* at its initial performance is quite intelligible. Though Hebbel wished here to reduce an " almost fantastic story to the hardest reality " (under-

standing "reality" in his own sense), he has succeeded only by burrowing his way there. The motives are not at first sight evident, but when grasped they carry the conviction that the situation has been revolved in every possible light and only that one chosen which seemed tragically necessary. These true and appealing characters are thus built up from within, and partake of the solidity of their creator's mind. The effect is more abiding than a patchwork of subtleties and suggestions, being organic and unshakable. This can be the only "realism"; for carried to a logical conclusion it would have to combine the patience of the Chinese play with the verisimilitude of the cinematograph.

Of the first two plays here translated something may be said. They have been rendered because they appealed most to the translator, a subjective reason, but a true ground for zest in the work. At the same time more complete specimens of Hebbel's dramatic art could not be found.

Gyges and his Ring, adapted from Herodotus, Plato, and perhaps Gautier, is a convincing example of Hebbel's Teutonism. The most prominent impression it leaves is that it is no Greek tale and no Greek form. Kandaules is too reflective a philosopher to have lived in the land of Lydian airs, Gyges has not the easy freedom of Greek youth; and Rhodope leaps at a bound from a cloistered negation into the terrible energy of an avenging goddess. Though she has the feminine pliancy and pard-like ferocity of the Oriental, yet the blend of reasoned motive in her conduct makes her a modern. Hebbel could not graecise, but he could create from the weft of his own nature strong beings resolute in the face of necessity for all their human error. If tragedy be the fatal misdirection of virtues rather than the collision of virtue and vice, this story is truly tragic; for three natures, all noble, by a single error are swept to one drastic atonement. Here, too, Hebbel, who had pondered so deeply on the meaning of the personality, shows what an irrevocable thunderblast meets the ignorant tamperer therewith.

In the *Judith*, Hebbel had essayed a Hebrew theme somewhat callowly, but his maturity produces a masterpiece. His fidelity to Josephus is remarkable, yet in his hands a bare narrative becomes the interaction of vivid forces.

Woman he understood, and Mariamne has in her the woman's strange blend of self-sacrificial devotion and guardianship of her soul. There is such truth of feeling, such regal sorrow, in this deep-hearted Maccabean, and such a war between pride and abasement resolved finally into a noble composure before the inevitable, that she must stand as one of the great women of tragedy. As for Herod, brave and resolute though he was, the erosive atmosphere of intrigue had made him so familiar with the sham attitude of diplomacy that an unsullied emotion baffled him. True insight would have made him responsive, for ignoble he was not. *Gyges* is the tragedy of a personality blindly unveiled; this is the tragedy of a personality blindly veiled.

The historic significance is finely brought out by the opposition of the statuesque Roman Titus against the shifting Hellenic decay. His noble gravity is the last confessional of Mariamne and his arms receive the swooning Herod. The future moulding influence of civilisation is shown in this steel-clad nature.

The episode of the Three Kings may be regarded as unhappy. No doubt, as the spiritual counterpart of Titus, it was meant to show the irresistible oncoming of a new influence, as well as the futility of Herod against Fate. But Fate is sufficient if she works from the characters involved, unless, as in *Agnes Bernauer*, the general issue is indissolubly linked with the particular. The doom of Herod was cast without the final irony of Christianity, whereby the tragedy of man and wife is unnecessarily inter-related with the world-drama.

As to the translation itself, the roll of Hebbel's verse is so distinctive that its preservation seemed necessary. Therefore, wherever possible, his lengthy sentences have been given their full value. He has also a habit of ending his lines with less accentuated words, and carrying the stress to the beginning of the following line. This at first jars, but as it was a conscious art-principle, it has been kept. We have spoken above of his theory of dramatic verse. By this device he tries to compensate for his roughness of style by another roughness which has a lightening effect. Both in the roll of his blank verse and in his broken rhythms it keeps his characters to a conversational pitch, whereby

he prevents an operatic effect. In reading such lines as these, from *The Eve of St. Agnes*—

> " And there hide
> Him in a chamber of such privacy
> That he might view her beauties unespied,"

one feels that by beginning the line with an unaccentuated word Keats throws emphasis on the rhyme. Hebbel employs the opposite device to prevent his heavy lines from crashing on the final word.

Let me lastly acknowledge my deep indebtedness to Mr. G. G. Nicholson, B.A., B.C.L., of the University of Sydney, whose fine scholarship and ready advice have been invaluable. If the rendering be correct, it is his virtue; the defects that will become apparent must be laid at the door of my own deficiencies.

L. H. ALLEN.

SYDNEY, N.S.W.,
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GYGES AND HIS RING

A TRAGEDY IN FIVE ACTS

Translated into English Verse by

L. H. ALLEN

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

KANDAULES, *King of Lydia.*
RHODOPE, *his Queen.*
GYGES, *a Greek.*
LESBIA, HERO } *Slave Maidens.*
THOAS, KARNA } *Slaves.*
THE PEOPLE.

The action is prehistoric and mythical. It takes place within a period of twenty-four hours.

HEBBEL'S PLAYS

GYGES AND HIS RING

ACT I

SCENE I

A Hall

Enter KANDAULES *and* GYGES. KANDAULES *buckles on his sword.* THOAS *follows with the diadem.*

KANDAULES. To-day you'll see what Lydia can achieve!
I know you Grecians, though your necks are bended,
Just for your standstill plight bear the old yoke
With gnashing teeth and lip-curl at your lords.
No thing on earth were easily invented
You were not quick to better, were't alone
The crown you add, you set it on—and lo,
The thing's your work, you see that it is good!
[THOAS *hands him the diadem.*
Bring the new diadem! What use is this?
Has your dolt's hand the sword as well mistaken?
[*Looks at his sword.*
Why yes, by Herakles whose feast we're holding!
What, Thoas, are you doddering ere your time?
THOAS. I thought——
KAN. Well, what?
THOAS. Not for five hundred years
Has King in other trapping graced the games
Your Ancestor, the Puissant, has stablished,
And when, the feast before, you made endeavour
To oust the hallowed things from olden honour,
The folk stood rooted, horrified, amazed,
Muttering as ne'er before.

KAN. And so you think
I should have marked their gapes for my salvation?
I've hit your thought?
THOAS. Lord, not without a shudder
I touch this diadem, and not till now
Has hand of mine been closed on this sword's hilt
That all the seed of Herakles once brandished;
But these new baubles I can see unblenching
Like any other such as blinks and glances
And is your own for paying of the price.
Not on Hephaestus do I need to think,
At sight of these, who for divine Achilles
His weapons smithied,—ay, and in the fire
Wherewith the thunderbolts for Zeus are steeled;
Nor yet on Thetis, she who bade her daughters
For him be fisherfolk of pearl and coral
That thus his decking fail not of its fill.
But *this* sword—why, I knew the man that forged it,
And him by whom *this* diadem was pieced!
KAN. Eh, Gyges!
THOAS. Sire, fair faith speaks out of me!
If I am overbold, 'tis for your welfare.
Believe my words, the many thousand folk
That stream t'assembly hither,—ay, albeit
They walk in finer wool and fare the daintier,—
Are just as fond or pious-prim as I.
This crown here and your head—these are for them,
Your henchman vouches, halves of a single whole,
And in like grade this sword here and your arm.
KAN. And that's the thought of all?
THOAS. Yes, by my head!
KAN. Then there's no room for dawdling! Take them off
And do what I have bid!
[THOAS *takes off the regalia.*
GYGES. You've hurt the man.
KAN. I know; but say, what else could I have done?
'Tis true what he has said; here the King's worth
Is gauged but by his crown, and the crown's worth
Owed to its rust. Woe to its furbisher!
Brighter but lighter—gain and loss are matched.

But why bemoan it if for just this once
I so forgot me—sheer worn out, and loath
Only by force of heirloom garb to glitter,
Pass current just as minted coins pass current
By take-for-granted worth, and share with statues
That in the sacred temple-niches stand
A blind and blockish sacrosanctity?
You can't undo what's done.

[THOAS *comes with the new adornment.*

Ah, thus 'tis good!

[*He puts on the diadem.*

That fits in place, and only what my realm
Of pearls and precious jewels disenwombs
From out the miner's shaft or bed of ocean,
Not more nor less, is here enharmonied.
The noble stone that is not found among us,
It matters not how fair, is straitly banned.
I need not say I've left a place for such
As are unearthed in the next hundred years.
Now do you follow?
(*To* GYGES.) That one fitly suits
Some massive giant-skull such as your sculptors
Are wont to give my forebear for a head-piece,
When in his lion-skin, with bulky club,
Towering above a streamlet's mossy rim,
You make him useful as a children's bogy.

[*He girds on the sword.*

This sword is somewhat lighter than the old one;
But that's no loss—you'll swing it, if you must,
Not outside merely 'neath unhampered heaven
Where giants at each other volley boulders,

[*He draws it and swings it.*

No, but in space cramped human-small, like this!
Then, Thoas, spare the pains of a third sermon,
To-day I've heard the second.

THOAS. Pardon, sire!
And yet you know 'tis not the young man's limbs
In which a change of weather gives its warning,
It is the old man's bones that feel it first. [*Exit.*

GYGES. He goes in sorrow!

KAN. True; he's loath to think
That the next thunderbolt will now strike me;
And that's fast in his mind. I may, perhaps,
Ere that can hap, be gulped into Earth's entrails
Unless, forsooth, the Minotaur appears!
Such is their fashion; do not therefore think
But light of them. This very day you'll see
Their fighting stuff.
GYGES. And wish to join the fighting.
KAN. What, Gyges?
GYGES. Sire, I beg you for the boon.
KAN. No, no! Beside myself you shall be seated
That all may see how much I give you honour
And will that all men give you honour-meed.
GYGES. But if you honour me you'll not refuse.
KAN. You know not what you do. Know you the Lydians?
You Grecians are a cunning folk; you set
The others all to spinning, and you weave,
And lo, a net wherein no piece of cordage
Belongs to you, yet the whole thing's your own!
How easy 'twere to tighten, and how swift
The wide world clutched in capture if the arm
The fisher stretched were but a little stronger,
The arm that should control! But there's the rub!
You have no trick to lure the nervy tendons
From out our bodies, so with artful seeming
We look much blinder than in truth we are,
And with a covert laugh we bungle in
Because a tiny fin-flick sets us free.
GYGES. We celebrate these games as well.
KAN. Yes, yes,
After a fashion, 'mongst yourselves. There Dorians
Grip with Ionians, and then, to cap it,
It comes to this—Boeotians join the fray,
And so you think that Ares' self looks on
And with a shudder marks your every blow.
Gyges, had every prize that's offered there
Been won by you, still were I forced to warn you
Avoid the lists e'en for the lowest guerdon.

We've ever set a wild and bloody pace;
But even a single twig of silver poplar,
Such as to-day are in their thousands strown,
Ventured by you, a Greek and in my graces,
Would ne'er allow you scapement of your life.

GYGES. And so I have your " yes "; no longer now
Can you withhold consent.

KAN. You take it so?
I were best mute.

GYGES. I came, Sire, not alone
For begging. (*He brings forth a ring.*) Take it!
'Tis a royal ring.
You look on it, find naught of mark therein,
You're mazed I am so bold to make the offer,
You'll take it, too, as from a child a flower,
To keep the poor and artless grace unwounded
That plucked it for you, not because you're pleased.
It's surface-show is meagre—true—and plain
And yet you cannot, for your kingly realm,
Purchase it for your own, nor yet with force,
'Spite all your power, turn robber 'gainst its wearer
Unless of free consent he will the gift.
You wear it so (*indicating with signs*) to make the metal rest
With forward trend—'tis but a trinket-thing,
Perchance not even as much, but give a twist
Just so far round that with its tiny shine
This stone of dullish red can fling its rays
And presto! you are viewless and go striding
Like gods enclouded up and down the world.
Therefore contemn it not, for once again—
It is a royal ring, and this same day
Long since I chose in which to make my present.
'Tis you alone may wear it, no one else.

KAN. Why, things before unheard sent even to us
Their rumouring; men spoke about a woman,
Medea was her name, and arts she plied
Such that the very moon was earthwards chanted;
But never have I heard of such a ring.
Where did you get it, then?

GYGES. From out a grave.
From out a grave that lies in Thessaly.
KAN. You oped a grave and sacrileged its peace?
GYGES. Nay, nay, my King—I found it oped to hand.
I only crept therein to slip from robbers
Toward hid retreat, for they in whelming odds
Were hot-foot on my track and harried me
As I, by some adventurous prompting driven,
Of late a desolate wooded mountain ranged.
The urns were overthrown and spilt their ashes,
In touching disarray the shards were scattered,
And in the sickly shaft of westering sunlight
That pierced a passage through the chinkéd wall
I saw a wisp of pallid dust was swaying.
It rose before me as the final motes
That vestige death, and turned my mood so eerie
That, lest my fellow-flesh, my very fathers
Perchance, be mixed with my unconscious breathing,
Long time I held the air within my breast.
KAN. Well? And the robbers?
GYGES. Found my every trace
Was vanished, so it seemed, for far and farther
Their dwindling voices died, and now I thought me
Already safe assured, although not yet
I left my glimmering retreat. As now
In such a plight I cramped upon my knees
My sight fell suddenly upon this ring.
From out the wreckage heaped in tangled waste
Its stone, as though it were a living thing,
Half minding me of some sharp serpent's eye,
Shot sparkles at me. Straight I raised it up,
I blew the ashes from it and I spoke:—
"Who bore thee once on his long-mouldered finger?"
And then, to see if 'twere a man had worn it,
I put it on, and scarce the deed was done
When from without rang—"Halt! He must be here!
See you the grave? Then onward, onward, comrades!
We have our man!" and quick appeared the troop.
But I was loath, like some defenceless beast
Harried into a hole, to suffer slaughter,

And springing forth I charged impetuous—flashing
Full at them, in my hand the lifted sword.
The sun was near the dipping of its disc
And streaming, like a candle destined soon
To quench its glow, with doubly vivid ray.
But they, as though for them alone the night
Outran its hour, stormed on with furious curses
Passing me by, and ringed them round the grave.
They raked it through, and, as I still was hid,
Cried out in scorn—" What odds? We'd find he bore
Nothing upon him but the truculent eye
That with its taunting glance so roused our rage;
Some other soon enough will blow *that* out! "
Then once again, but with chagrin's slow footsteps,
Peering around and in my face even staring,
They passed me by and I was still unseen.

KAN. And then you thought——

GYGES. Not on the ring—not yet.
My notion was a god had wrought a wonder
To save me, and upon my knees I flung me
And thus to the Invisible One I spoke:—
" I know not who thou art, and if from me
Thy face thou hid'st, I cannot slay for thee
The beast that is thy consecrated due;
But for a sign that I have thanks at heart
And lack not courage, I will bring to thee
The fiercest of these robbers as thy meed,
And this I swear, how hard soe'er it prove."
I hastened after them and slipped amid
Their company, and I was seized with shudders
Before myself, to see how I alone
Was marked not of them, how they spoke together,
As I were air and void, right through my form
And through it even handed bread and wine.
My eyes grew overveiled and ranging fell
Upon the ring-set stone whose radiance red
And brilliant from my hand was scintillating
With restless well and swell and pearly bubbling
Puffed into vapour; and it seemed an eye
That ever breaks in blood which ever steams.

I turned it, sheer compelled, to make confession,
Sheer terrified; for all these pearls were glinting
Like just as many stars; it touched my mood
As though the pure ethereal stream of light
Lay naked to mine eyes and I were blind
From overglory, as the harmony
They tell of in the spheres makes all men deaf.
But straight I felt me in a lusty grip
And "What is this? Hey! Who held him concealed?
A pretty joke!" was ringing in my ears.
And now ten fists were grappling for my throttle,
Ten others made to rip my raiment from me,
And I had surely met inglorious end
Had not the clumsiest fist of all the mob
Held back to snatch the ring; for suddenly
The cry was raised—"Hallo! He is not poor!
Here's a fine fish i' the net! See, blinking gold,
Ay, and a precious stone! Come, here with it!"
But almost in the selfsame-taken breath
Rang out—"A god, a god is come among us!"
And lo, they all were lying at my feet!

KAN. Just as their hands about the ring were scrambling
They turned it round again and went a-quiver
As you evanished like a shape of cloud.

GYGES. It must be so. But now I turned it back,
At last initiate in its mystic secret,
And filled with pride and recklessness I called,
"A god! Even so! And each pays penance due!"
Then hot-foot set upon them. Horror-struck,
As though I bore within my hands the thunder
And at my side new modes of death in thousands,
They scarce retained the heart and strength for flight.
But I was on their heels as though compelled
To act the vicar in the Furies' office,
And not a soul came free of my revenge.
I would have rendered to the grave its ring,
But though I'd strewn the way with bloody corses
That marked the backward path, neither at evening
Nor yet with morning could it be discovered,

And so against my will the ring was mine.
KAN. Such treasure has no peer.
GYGES. Said I not so?
A royal ring! Then take it, Royal One!
KAN. Not till the battle's ended.
GYGES. Sire, since then
I never have and ne'er again will wear it.
So niggard of your wood? O fie! A forest
Will not be needed for my funeral pyre;
A single tree's enough, and trust this arm,
You'll get remittance of the single tree.
KAN. Then give't! I'll test it.
GYGES. And I'll weapon me.
[*Exeunt.*

SCENE 2

The Queen's Apartment

Enter RHODOPE *with her attendants, among them* LESBIA *and* HERO.

RHODOPE. And now be happy, maidens mine; to-day
Your whims are free. Though I must blame you dear
If other times you even hide and listen,
And though my gay-heart Hero yesterday,
Who clambered up the tree, were sternly scolded
Had not a bough, for all her lightsome limb,
Swift-snapping dealt her punishment enough,
Being over-weak for such a weight of wonder——
HERO. O Queen, and if it verily caught your eyes
You'll know as well it was the thickest one
Of all our garden-trees that I had chosen.
RHOD. The thickest one! Maybe; but certain 'tis
The one that stood the nearest to the wall.
HERO. The thickest one of all! I clambered up
And pierced into a very night of green.
'Twas well-nigh eerie when the golden day
Was thus behind me left, and in the darkness
I still crept on.

RHOD. What made you do it, then?
HERO. No wish to bring Olympus some few feet
Nearer my reach; no, such I freely granted
The nightingale a-trilling overhead.
I wanted—nay, but laugh not—I can never
Forget my cradle-rocking, and I wanted
A tiny rock up yonder.
RHOD. Nothing more?
HERO. And as I swung, nay not of set desire,
But as I swung—no more, just peep a fraction;
I'd be so glad to know if round our garden,
As scowling Karna ever says to us,
There runs a lake.
LESBIA. A lake!
HERO. Ah, you know better?
LESBIA. Ho, have you ever heard it here a-swishing?
And is a lake untroublous as yourself?
RHOD. I will not question further, for I know
You'll not do thus again. Ne'er fell a maiden
So soft as you, nor e'er was frighted so.
LESBIA. Yes, all her limbs were swooned away.
HERO. And never
Ought I have fallen, for a stronger bough
Was near enough; but as it moved it swayed
A nest with young ones, and I would beware
Of trampling on them lest the tender brood,
Its featherless wings already in a flutter,
Be thrown in flurry.
LESBIA. This then was the cause?
Yet they flew up. You ended with a grasp,
There's not a doubt, a desperate grasp for safety.
RHOD. Tease long as e'er you will; this is the day
On which the cabined house for you is open;
Now to it as you may and sate your eyes!
HERO. And you?
RHOD. Nay, eye not me. What's granted you
Is merely not forbid to me. To-day
I cannot be your paragon and pattern.
HERO. And once again you will not see the feast?
RHOD. Nay, lest my presence mar your merry frolic.

With us it is not wont, and I should feel
As though I were to eat and have no hunger
Or drink and feel no thirst. It seems to me
That we've a better way at home than yours,
For ne'er without a shudder turn you home
From feasts like these whose outset is so luring.
And her I love most dearly who most deeply
Can thrill with pain nor goes a second time.
But that would not show blame in you—why, no!
Only I'm happy that my Lesbia,
Who's grown to woman with you, feels as I.

LESBIA. Will you to-day forgive me——

RHOD. Why, what's this?
And what must I forgive you? You would go?
Oh, but to take my praise back! Now she's shamed,
Ashamed to be the daughter of her folk,
And has no cause. Am I myself aught other?
Go, go, and tell me who the victor was.

HERO. Young Gyges too will surely join the fighting,
He of the noble voice.

RHOD. So soon you know
How rings his voice?

HERO. Oh, yes—but nothing more.
To-day we'll see him, and believe my words,
She goes, like us, only for him.

LESBIA. But I
May cheat you, and remaining prove your falsehood.

HERO. Oh, that you'll never do.

[KANDAULES *enters in haste.*

KAN. Rhodope, greeting!
But know you who I am? A carpet-gallant,
A kingly ninth-of-man, forsooth a measurer
Of ells but not of swords, who is to blame
That Herakles' twelve deeds have not long since
Found four-and-twenty other feats and greater
For overmatch. If you will not believe 't
Why only ask Alcaeus—old curmudgeon!
You know him not? Nor I, before to-day.
And know you how I use to make men happy?
I speak thus:—"Come, young man, here is a seed!

Now plant it in the earth and sprinkle o'er
The spot with water; do it day by day
And be assured that when your hair is frosty
You'll have a meal of cherries for your pains.
What? 'Sweet or sour?'—You'll not find out till then!"
I give you Agron as my guarantee
Worthy Alcaeus names him worthy friend,
His perfect peer, but not so white of beard.

RHOD. Your mood is merry.

KAN. Ay, and wherefore not?
'Tis true Alcaeus, outright in rebellion,
Will make against me soon as e'er I venture
To show myself to him as thus to you,
Bedecked, I mean, with the new diadem.
Agron will deign me succour, and for thanks
I'm merely forced to swear—be not astounded
At such a lamblike heart—to keep my garb
For aye unaltered, and a sword to carry
Whose mere unsheathing drains my utmost strength.

RHOD. Where did you gain this knowledge?

KAN. Through no spy,
Nor yet the more through any false-heart friend,
But from themselves, direct from their own mouths.

RHOD. You're pleased to mock my questioning.

KAN. No, no!
I speak in utter earnest. I stood by
While they set nails a-grubbing at the tables,
Digging their whetted teeth in their own lips
As though 'twere game and not their very flesh,
And took the oath which sure enough they'll hold.
It makes a Bar of God here in a fashion—
One hacks at me, the other wards the blow,
And Diké passes verdict if she can.

RHOD. You must have eavesdropped, then; I'll not believe 't.
If I come in a place all unexpected
I make a warning noise that I be marked,
And what should be unheard be left unsaid.
And you—no, no—that is no kingly act.

KAN. Why, surely not—but *that* you'd ne'er unriddle.
You see this ring? How do you rate its worth?
RHOD. How can I tell from whom it comes?
KAN. From Gyges.
RHOD. You'll think it past all rating then.
KAN. It is;
And yet you dream not why. Then hear the marvel—
If any put it on it makes him viewless.
RHOD. Viewless?
KAN. Just now I tried it for myself.
" Nay, no more climbing, Hero! Only birdlings
Go hiding in the leafage! "[1]
RHOD. Lesbia!
KAN. Through every door I stalk along—naught holds me,
Nor lock nor bolt, at distance due.
RHOD. How fearful!
KAN. For all bad souls, you mean.
RHOD. No, no, I say!
For all good souls, still more, still more! (*To* LESBIA.) Can you
Still breathe unruffled, will not blushing shame
Dissolve you now you know't? Sire, cast it hence
Down, down into the deepest flood! When more
Than mortal strength is given a man, he's born
Half-god, innate, sufficient. Give it me!
My people say that things through which the world
May fly to fragments, here and there on earth
Are lying hid. They reach us from the time
When men and gods still walked the world together
And pledged their love with mutual gifts. This ring
Is of that time, and who can tell what hand
Bore this, what goddess put it on, what bond
It sealed of yore? Do you not shiver to think
That her dark gift's your arrogated plunder
And that you draw her vengeance on your head?
I shudder at the very sight—then give it!

[1] He here imitates Rhodope's voice, intimating that he has overheard her reproof of Hero.

KAN. On one condition—this, that you as Queen
Will show you at the feast to-day.
RHOD. How can I?
You bore away a bride from farthest borders
Seclusion-hedged, and knew her as she was.
Once you were glad that never an eye ere yours,
Except alone my Sire's, had rested on me
And that none after you should win the sight.
KAN. Forgive! I only think the precious stone
That's not displayed——
RHOD. Will lure no robber's lust!
KAN. Enough. Alas, this " No " is but your wont.
Yes, let the wind blow fresh from every quarter
On fluttered veils—you'll keep yours tight and trim.
[*Music.*
The pomp! No time for kings to fail their presence.
RHOD. Yes, but the rebels? Ah, I'm pained to-day
That I dare not go with you.
KAN. You are kind,
But have no anxious fret—the matter's settled.
RHOD. In truth?
KAN. In truth. I need not say through fear;
I punished them through force alone, not choice.
This life's too short to let a man therein
Earn even so much as the desert of death,
And so to-day I'd not condemn one gladly. [*Exit.*
RHOD. Now all of you begone!
LESBIA. I'll stay, my Queen.
RHOD. Oh, no; your nurse ne'er crooned a prophecy
That some man's face would token death for you.
[*Exeunt* LESBIA, HERO, *and the others.*
They're over-dull to dream here; even the noblest
(*looking after* LESBIA)
Is irked by what I deem peculiar joy.

Scene 3

Open space. A crowd. Kandaules *on his throne.* Lesbia, Hero, *and others at one side, on a raised structure. The games are just over. General stir and drifting into groups. Wrestlers, boxers, charioteers, etc., come by degrees to sight, all crowned with branches of the Silver Poplar. Wine is handed round. Music. The Feast begins.*

The People. Hail, Gyges, hail!
Kan. (*gazing into the background*). In discus-throwing, too?
For the third time? I should be sore to see it!
Why this leaves not a doit for mine own people!
[*He descends and goes to meet* Gyges *as he comes from the background. The people are still acclaiming him and make way for him.*
A modest fellow, you, forsooth! You take
No more than's here.
Gyges. My Lord, I fought to-day
As Greek and not as Gyges.
Kan. All the sorrier
For us if the new standard's set by you.
Why, then we'll have to start at lumber-hunting
And stuff to bulging those old skins of dragons
That, left by Herakles in some odd place,
Some temple hiding-hole, must now lie mouldering.
The bladdered serpent, too, the hundred-headed,
And any bogy that can raise Greek hair.
You hear me not.
Gyges. I do, I do!
Kan. Oh no!
I see too well. You slant at yonder maidens
Your listless eyes. They see it too. Look there!
The shorter twits the taller. You go red?
Pooh, shame on you!
Gyges. I'm thirsty, Sire.
Kan. You're thirsty?
Why, that's another tale. Who fights like you

Has honest right unto a goodly drink,
And though I lack the right I'll share the draught.
Ah, now there comes the part o' the feast I love!
(*Beckons to a servant.*) Come hither!
[*The servant brings a goblet of wine.* KANDAULES *pours some drops on the earth.*
First the root and then the branch!
[*He drinks and is about to hand the goblet to* GYGES, *but he is again looking towards the raised structure.*
Come! Ho! Brunette or dark? That is the question,
Eh, friend?

GYGES. Oh, Sire?

KAN. Your palate likes the wine?

GYGES. I've not yet drunk.

KAN. You know't? Then let your ears
Accept reminder of your thirst and to it!
I guarantee you this, that long enough
She'll stay to let you ease the press of pain.

GYGES (*drinks*). That cools!

KAN. Alack the day, down sinks your star!
[*The maidens retire, but can still be seen.*
Well, it was time. Just glance around. Already
They twine as though about a Thyrsus-staff
That, sudden-launched from earth in upward sally,
And swift and swifter dartwise nearing heaven,
Cascades the clusters of a million grapes.
Wine fits the subtler stuff of winged Beings,
But not the world of hobbling crawling man,
It stands him on his head. That old man there
Would never stick at mounting on a tiger
Or pranking his shrunk temples with a garland,
As Dionysos did when Ganges-bound.
But I'm at home with loosed wits—Was she fair?

GYGES. I know not if what pleases me be fair.

KAN. Say " yes "—no blushes! an eye like a coal,
Only a-glimmer, but at lightest breath
Bursting in sparks shot with such twining hues
You could not tell if it be black or brown;
And then, as though this restless weft of colour

Immingled with her every drop of blood,
'Tis fluctuant 'twixt shame and love unbreathed
That gives her blush a tint of peerless charm.

GYGES. You make complete what the wind half-way wrought;
It stirred the fringes, you uplift the veil.

KAN. Not that you owe the bent knee at her power—
Nay, should I guide you to another vision,
A sight like this, for all its winsomeness,
You'd purge your eye of as it were a fleck
That touched your glass with tarnish.

GYGES. Think you, Sire?

KAN. Even so; but stay—you should not cry a prize
Which cannot be displayed—that earns you jeering.
Who's gulled by cries of " pearls! " when the hand's shut?

GYGES. I.

KAN. Gyges—why, the shadow of Rhodope
Cast in the shine o' the moon—you smile! We'll drink.

GYGES. I smile not.

KAN. Smile you should, then! Where's the man
That cannot boast thus? Should you speak to me
As I to you, I'd say—" Then show her me
Else hold your tongue."

GYGES. I trust you.

KAN. Trust me, eh?
The eye commands your credence, not the ear.
You trust me! Ho! This shrinking bit of a girl
Gave you hot cheeks, and now—enough, enough—
I'll pout my breast no more with windy babble
Such as for all this length of time I've used.
Nay, you shall see her.

GYGES. See her!

KAN. And to-night.
I want some soul to witness that I'm not
A futile fool, a mere self-dupe that boasts
He has the fairest woman for his kissing.
I fill the want with you.

GYGES. Oh, never more

Think on it!—for the man 'twere blot of soul,
But for a woman,—woman such as she
That even by day——

KAN. Why, why—she'll never learn it.
Have you forgot the ring? And I'll ne'er be
A happy man till your lips say I am.
Come, ask you—if the crown were to your liking
Should you be bound to wear it but in darkness?
Well, that's the plight I'm in with her. She is
The Queen of women, but I hold possession
Of her as Ocean holds its pearls—none dreams
How rich I am, and when I'm dead and done with
There's not a friend can set it on my tombstone,
And so I lie i' the grave, beggar to beggar.
Then do not say me nay, but take the ring.

[*He proffers it to* GYGES, *who will not take it.*

The night is closing in; I'll show the chamber
And when you see me tread the floor with her
Then follow us.

[*Takes* GYGES *by the hand and draws him along with him.*

I lay demand on you,
And is it not a debt to Lesbia forfeit?
Perhaps she is the vanquisher.

[*Exeunt.*

ACT II

A Hall. Early morning. Enter THOAS.

THOAS. I will and must have further parley with him.
To think what I've been forced to hear this night!
Heaven knows I went not out to catch the talk,
Yet home I come as packed as though I were
The wandering ear o' the bloodiest of tyrants
And scarce had faith I'd see my Lord again.
Rebellion, imminent raid of sudden foemen,
Yea, a new choice of King! Is't possible?
I dreaded much, but dreaded not so much.
Hist, hist! Are those not footfalls? Yes! Why, who
Is out of bed with greybeards ere the morn?
The youthful Gyges! Ho! but if you knew
What I now know you'd have no droop i' the gait!
[*He retires. Enter* GYGES.

GYGES. And once again I'm here! What will I here?
I sicken in the fresh of heaven. With scent
The air's besprent, so leaden and sense-steeping
'Twould seem that every flower with one accord
Were opened, that the lungs of men be stifled,
And Earth herself outgasped her latest breath.

THOAS. So gay and early, Karna? Pardon, I took you,
Lord, for another. You not yet in bed?
I trow the taste of fame bans sleep—oho!

GYGES. The taste of fame?

THOAS. Why, look at all the garlands
You carried off——

GYGES. So that the laurel-tree
Need never fear me more! My wish was merely
To prove that bones may be inside a man
And marrow in those bones, although that man
Snap not a zither's strings to tattered shreds
At the first touch. Now not a soul but knows it

Whate'er the doubt he may till now have had;
And that is good.

THOAS. But why then take no sleep?

GYGES. Why do you take no drink?

THOAS. I guess you rose
Once ere this.

GYGES. If I went to bed, why yes!

THOAS. Just what I'd like to know; for if he's heard
What I have heard—Pooh! no—I'll vow he can't have. [*Slowly retires.*

GYGES. She slumbers still! O blest, who dares to wake her!
'Tis dared by the nightingale that even now
Still half in dream sweet orison begins;
'Tis dared—He comes! What can he think of me?
[*Enter* KANDAULES.
She wakes, and yet she offers show of sleeping.

KAN. Gyges! So soon? Or should I ask you—still?
But no, I have your word.

GYGES. Here is the ring!

KAN. So early and so hasty?

GYGES. 'Tis your own.

KAN. You trust yourself no longer to retain it?

GYGES. Why not? And yet why should I? Take the thing!

KAN. This tells me even more than what your sigh
Already told i' the night.

GYGES. Forgive it, Sire!

KAN. Why, what a thing you say! It was my triumph!

GYGES. And did you only hear it then?

KAN. Oh no—
She started up, she shrieked—and did all that
So fully slip your eyes? No further then
I need to ask if I am conqueror.

GYGES. It did not slip my eyes.

KAN. Keep on—deny
Your wits were all a pother. Nay, I have
Still better proof to clinch the thing—you went
So far to turn the ring and know it not!

GYGES. And know it not!

KAN. She trembled, and when she
Grew 'ware o' the noise, she cried, " Arise, Arise!
I' the corner lurks a man! It is his will
Thy bane to be, or mine! Where is thy sword? "
I made pretence I felt her fear, and did so—
When lo, revealed stood—you, before me there,
Sharp outlined by the lamp's intensest beam.
Is that enough? Now are you dumb to me?

GYGES. My will was to be seen.

KAN. You say that now
To rob my victory of its edge. Had I
Not stepped between to shut you from her glances
Or ere they lit on you, I had been forced
To strike you dead.

GYGES. Sire, this I knew right well,
And just because I'd force you to the action
I turned the ring around with hasty twitch.

KAN. What, Gyges?

GYGES. Yes, it shocked the sight of heaven
This boldness—yes, I felt it.

KAN. I allowed it.

GYGES. But in the stifling closeness of that moment,
It seemed as though you had no right thereto,
And I would punish you with me; for fain
You had not been to strike me dead.

KAN. You varlet!

GYGES. And even now a shudder thrills my soul
As though some ugly thing I had committed
For which 'tis true the lip may lack a name
But not the conscience the implanted sense.
Yea, if I held that trash, that Dead Man's Ring
Thrust on my hand by you, nor yet in wrath
Pitched it before your feet; and if instead
I used its power once more for speedy flight,
What checked the act was shame I felt for her,
For her I'd spare the shocked recoil, for her
The eternal crypt of shadow round her Being,
Not you—forgive my fevered wish—the deed.

KAN. You are a fool!

GYGES. A fool! It drove me forth

As though, if still I tarried there, a sense,
A newer, purer, must in her awaken,
The self-same sense that woke in Artemis
Before Actaeon's scan, that must betray
To woman, as to goddess, what had passed.
I'll flee not after murder in such mind.

KAN. Murder—Nay, nay!

GYGES. Who knows? The gods' aversion
Is on polluted heads. Oh, what if now
The golden Aphrodite, deep-offended,
Were forced t' avert her from her dearest daughter,
Because a stranger eye had 'filed the pure!
She's loath to do't; she lingers, for she hopes
The swoop of retribution follows on.
Goddess, remit no smile! I bring the due!

KAN. There spake the Grecian!

GYGES. Sire, vouchsafe to me
A last request.

KAN. A thousand, if you will,
But not the last request; that comes too soon.

GYGES. Take me as sacrifice! I make you gift
Of my young life—turn not the gift away!
Still many a splendid year I count as mine
And every one will swell your own if you
Will but accept them at Zeus' altar-stone.
Then follow; let me hold to you one hand
In the firm grip of pact, and with the other
Thrust me clean through by custom's holy ordinance;
With rapture, yea, with smiles it shall be done.

KAN. I almost rue the deed! Here rant and rave,
Within suspicion—Bah!

GYGES. Why vacillate?
How oft have young men in free-willed devotion
Libated their own blood to some war-chief
What time death's shadow merely fringed his peril,
How oft been spent for some stark maniac's rage!
Why not this once then for a happy soul,
Why not for you, whereby long time to come
You may be blest and blessing among men?
You rob me nowise. What have I, what can I

Accomplish? Speak! But you win much indeed,
For envious are the gods, and it may chance
The snipping shears o' the jealous-minded Parcae
May sever all too soon life's golden cord
The while their malice stretches out my span.
Outstrip their will; give joy the unbroken length
She meant should cling to pain. Do it forthwith!

KAN. No more of this! You know your worth to me,
And if I turned a greybeard on the spot
With drouthy lips and wither in my veins
I'd borrow not the newer glow from you.

GYGES. Nay, e'en in this your prime the bid were fruitless,
For if my blood with yours could be immingled,
For all its heat 'twere left but what it is.

KAN. At this late hour you're shaken in the mind
And know not what you say and what you do.

GYGES. Forgive me, Sire!

KAN. Good faith, I chide you not!
Mere reel of head like that from winy fumes,
A cooling breath of morn will blow it hence!
(*As he goes*) Such is at least my hope, and such I'll see. [*Exit.*

GYGES. Why did I let the ring go back? I should have
Evanished, nevermore be seen of men;
Thus could I ever be about her, thus
Could see her as the gods alone may see her;
For this or that they hold as private hoard,
One charm of beauty to herself unknown,
One brightness in the deepest solitude,
One last, one utter mystery of spell
That lives for them and now would live for me.
'Tis true I would not cheat them of revenge
Should I take stolen sippings from the chalice
That for them only brims and sparkles o'er;
The air with sudden bruit would soon be ringing
And Helios, at the inciting beckon of flame
From wrathful Aphrodite all afired,
Would launch on me the most unerring arrow
Of all the unerring store his quiver bears.

Then would I reel from life, but that were naught,
For with the rattle at throat I'd clasp the ring,
Once more to turn it, abject at her feet;
And all her soul, as mine sank to its ebbing,
I'd suck into my parched self from her glances,
Upyielding thus my latest gasp of breath.

[THOAS *enters with* LESBIA, *who is veiled.*

THOAS. The King sends Gyges, as his honoured favourite,
The beauteous slave that pleases him right well.

GYGES. The King will have me for his mirth; such usage
I've earned not at his hands, nor will endure.

THOAS. 'Tis true the gift is rich and of the rarest,
But doubt not of the King's sincere intent.

GYGES. Peace, densest loon among all densest loons,
The King's " sincere intent " is grossest mock.

THOAS. Open your mouth, my girl, and say't yourself
If he can't trust me when I open mine.

GYGES (*to* LESBIA). Girl, girl—no word!

THOAS. You spurn the gift o' the King?

GYGES. Yes!

THOAS. Gyges! Well, well, *you* know what you do!

GYGES. The King kills me, and now to pay the body
For life, he thrusts a jewel in its hand!

THOAS. I know not what you mean, and will announce
What I have heard. (*To* LESBIA.) So come you back with me.

LESBIA (*to* GYGES). You'll see me not a second time. Forgive
That I have spoken, though indeed it sounds
So roughly in your ears.

GYGES. Nay, sweetest child,
But place yourself behind yon platanus
And speak as now—some love-lorn boy will cry,
" A nightingale that speaks as well as sings! "

LESBIA. You are no boy.

GYGES. Nay, nay, I'm not so much;
You see that well. 'Tis true I had a notion,
A thought I'm not the weakest hand at weapons,
That I'd done thus and thus, and none could ever
Get nipping at my ears without his buffet;

And, if by just the twist of luck a better
Were absent, I'd be called in danger's hour.
But those are boyish dreams—the lash to the booby
For tippling wine i' the night!

LESBIA. First bring to me
A bough of laurel-tree, then will I lash you
And after weave for you the wreath.

GYGES. And so
You shared my dream? Maybe then it was true,
And yet the mock!

LESBIA. The mock? Where is the mock?

GYGES. Stand *you* not there?

LESBIA. Oh, cruel!

GYGES. Not so, not so,
In truth not so!

LESBIA. You've killed ere now a many;
Have you e'er brought one to his re-awakening?

GYGES. You are most fair—Ay, verily, a blend
Of lily and of rose that in their plot
Make variant weft of hues, by pranksome winds
In such a juggling mingle set to swaying
There's not an eye can sift the shades apart.
Now you are red, now pale—and lo, you're neither,
You're both at once!

LESBIA. What know you, then, of me?
That was your dream; I look far otherwise—
See and recoil! [*She offers to unveil herself.*

GYGES (*preventing her*). No, no.

LESBIA (*to* THOAS). Back to the Queen!
(*To* GYGES.) She gave me not away in joy, she'll take
Me gladly back again.

GYGES. Then say to her
I have not cast one look upon your face.

LESBIA. Oh, insult!

GYGES. Nay, you know I spied at you
How often yesterday; till then I ne'er
Had seen you.

LESBIA. Then, it seems, I ever
Was at some childish trick. Oh, I am ashamed
I marked it not till now; and yet the others

Deserve the blame for all their teasing pranks.
GYGES. I only saw what charmed me.
LESBIA. Surely so,
For that which charms we love beneath a veil.
Come, come, old man!
GYGES. And wherefore hasten so?
I am your lord, but tremble not at me;
I ask of you one service, only one,
Which granted you may leave.
LESBIA (*to* THOAS). Then go alone.
GYGES. Stay, stay! But no. Present the King my thanks.
I take his present; how I do it honour
I'll give him proof.
THOAS. 'Tis good. [*Exit.*
LESBIA. And now the service?
GYGES. You'll tarry long enough to make your smiling
Come back to you.
LESBIA. That will not happen soon.
GYGES. And meantime while the hour in talk with me.
You tend the Queen's own person—there's no taste
No faintest in the peach you have not brought,
Tell me of her.
LESBIA. Of her?
GYGES. I only mean——
Well, if you will, of something else—the garden
In which she wanders—or about the flowers
She loves the most to pluck—of yourself too;
I'm fain to hear't—Where are you like each other?
Tell me at once and win my smiles at once!
In stature? Nay, not quite; far less in form,
But, for amends, your hair is black like hers
But not so full—hers creeps about her face,
Fringing it as the night the evening star.
What else have you of hers?
[LESBIA *makes an involuntary movement.*
Nay, nay—stand still.
In gait she's none but she; when you go stepping
'Tis seen your trend is hitherward or thither,
You swerve to the lure o' the date or else the spring;

But when she moves we cast our upward eyes
Upon the Heaven, to see if Helios
Will set the golden sun-car earthward dipping
To lift her in, and companied with her
Trample his path through all Eternity!

LESBIA. Yes, she is fair.

GYGES. And why the downward eyelids?
Come, pretty maid, uplift them, for methinks
They rain her very fire.

LESBIA (*with a dry sobbing laugh*). That well may be
In such an hour!

GYGES. My words have caused you pain?

LESBIA. I laughed, I think—and now have leave to go.

GYGES. But not without a gift; yes, sweetest child,
I'd have you think on Gyges still with loving,
I own he's rough and deals the unwary wound
Full oft, and not least often with the tongue,
But never has he left one yet unhealed.

[*Enter* KANDAULES.

KAN. Well?

GYGES. Sire, your coming fits the nick of time.

KAN. Then here must be two happy souls to find.

GYGES. Not yet, but soon; (*to* LESBIA) I pray you, give your hand!
How tender 'tis, how hard of grain is mine,
How scarry-seamed from sword and dart! To match them—
Fie, an ill thought! On this a rose's leaf,
A crumpled nothing, must imprint a pang,
On mine the sharpest thorn goes bent and blunt;
Yours twitches as a gyve were smithied round it.
Child, have no fear! I do not grip you thus
Because I wish to stay you. The King knows
I grasp not merely his express word's meaning,
I'm quick as well i' the uptake of his hint.
He saw with pain that Nature has for you
So much achieved, and naught that hussy Luck;
He bids me succour you and fill Luck's office.
I do so (*releasing her*) and herewith declare you free!

LESBIA. They say that liberty's a noble boon;

I know it not, being snatched as child for spoil,
And yet one must give thanks for noble boons,
So for my liberty I give you thanks.

GYGES. Are you contented, Sire?

KAN. I'm thunderstruck!

GYGES (*to* LESBIA). And since it seems you know not where your mother
Weeps yearning tears, or where your sire's house stands
Enter, until you find it, into mine,
'Tis yours; I'll rob it only of my sword.

[*Exit* LESBIA.

KAN. What means this, Gyges?

GYGES. Sire, my thanks that you
Have wished me bring this work to the rounding finish;
Yet yours it stays to the end.

KAN. You wish, it seems,
To see just once the Heraclid aroused;
Then have a care, his sleep is not so sound!

GYGES. Can I to-day offend you?

KAN. No—forgive!
But go forthwith and take from out my hoard
Double the measure of your squandered present.
Your deed has vexed me, and it hurts me still.

GYGES. Be gracious if I cannot meet your wish.
Such trash is changed like magic to a load,
And when, with all this gold and precious stones,
The beauteous slave-girl came to swell the treasure,
I used the slender whiteness of her neck
And hung thereon the precious vanities.
I can employ naught further than my sword,
But if you will be gracious unto me
Make me a present of your foemen's heads;
I'll make their tale complete to the very last.

KAN. O Gyges, you are other than you were!

GYGES. I am so, Sire.

KAN. You love!

GYGES. You saw that maiden?
I could have hewn her piecemeal! Do I love?

KAN. You love Rhodope!
GYGES. Sire, 'tis only this—
I cannot serve you more.
KAN. Go, if you must.
It grieves me, but I dare not now refuse you,
And since you will not take a gift from me
I cannot keep a present of your making.
Here is your ring.
GYGES. Give me your sword instead.
KAN. I thank you that you show such noble mind.
[*Is about to go.*
GYGES. There's something yet (*takes a jewel from his breast*)—this (*proferring it*).
KAN. Why, what——
GYGES. Well you know it.
KAN. Rhodope's diamond!
GYGES. I took the thing,
From there upon her neck—forgive the deed!
It is atoned.
KAN. Is this your hand, Erinnyes?
Oh, verily ye are most light of sleep!
GYGES. You're bitter 'gainst me.
KAN. No, not you. Farewell,
But never must we see each other more. [*Exit.*
GYGES. Never! I go forthwith. Then where's the goal?
Come, come—what was my quest before this Lydian
Countered my path? Forgot so soon? Why no!
There was the lure that drew me to old Nile
Where men with yellow skins and slitten eyes
Build for dead monarchs everlasting houses.
Then ho for the old road! I'll give a spell
To some poor wretch down there who's wearied out.

ACT III

RHODOPE'S *chamber.* HERO *and other slave-girls occupied in arranging the room. Enter* RHODOPE.

RHODOPE. Why are these mirrors round the walls unveiled?
HERO. The mirrors, Queen?
RHOD. The mirrors. And these doors
So wide ajar—whose work is this?
HERO. You love
To have your outlook towards the sunlit morning
And draw into your lungs its freshening breath.
RHOD. Who tells you that? Enough— To with their bolts!
Turn every mirror round!
[HERO *shuts the doors and turns round the mirrors.*
My soul, 'tis true!
Vain, vain the salve of flattering persuasion
That I have duped my senses. Turn thee, Night,
And pall me in the dunnest of thy veils!
I am defiled as never yet was woman.
HERO. This rose at least you will not all despise;
Ere the sun's self had risen I plucked it for you,
RHOD. Away! Too soon it withers at my touch!
HERO. My name is Hero and not Lesbia.
[*She retires with her companions.*
RHOD. Eternal gods, could this thing come to pass?
How many a time has my pure infant-hand
Yielded your due of pious sacrifice!
For you the first lock fell from off my head
Ere yet I guessed the source of every blessing
That prospers men was held within your hand.
Nor was the virgin ever slow to tend
Your service; rarely sent her altar-flame

A twinned desire toward your lofty seat,
Nay, every wish that threatened rise she strove
To crush in shame and anguish to the depths
Beneath her conscious thought; for she would win
Only your benison and not your bounty,
She would but thank, naught would she supplicate.
The Woman, too, needed no ghostly dream
Like that which smote the Tyndarid with horror,
To monish her of duty's holy bond;
She came herself and decked the altar round
And yet—why dedicates a mortal man
To you the choicest part of all his goods
If ye show not the gracious will to shield
When he himself no more has power to shield?
A man repels the lion with his sword
When, by the goad of rage or hunger driven,
He flashes rampant at the midday heat;
No brave man calls on Zeus to hurl his bolts,
But ward against the base snake's crept surprisal
When he is steeped in calm war-weary slumber;
There is your work; to you belongs the night.
And I—and I—rests then a curse on me,
A curse from ancient time that holds your power
Bounden in Styx, that god-affront so heinous
There's none would even dare it on a slave-girl
The meanest of my train, falls on myself
Sanctioned by you like a god-fearing deed?

[*Enter* HERO.

HERO. The King!

RHOD. So soon? 'Tis death that comes with him!
Then good; it palls me in the night of nights
Whereof the earthly night is but a shade.
Why tremble, then? It was my very wish.

[*Enter* KANDAULES.

KAN. Do you forgive?

RHOD. Sire, you can do no other,
The appointed hour is now. Why this much asking?

KAN. I understand you not.

RHOD. Be open, King!
You find me ready.

KAN. Ready! To what end?
RHOD. I know your duty and I give you thanks
You're bent on swift fulfilment; of a truth
It must be mine were you of tardy will.
You've searched, tracked down, and taken instant vengeance,
It breaks out from your looks—now comes my turn!
KAN. Where do your strayed wits tend?
RHOD. Are you not come
For vengeance hither?
KAN. No, by all the gods!
RHOD. And all have life that yesterday had life?
KAN. Why not?
RHOD. There's many may have done foul crime.
KAN. I know of none.
RHOD. And what then brings you here?
KAN. Should yesternight absolve my right of coming?
Have you then changed? Did you not e'en refuse
The solitary kiss for which I begged
As though you sat, the lily in your hand,
Beneath the plane as in the olden time?
RHOD. You'll live to thank me for it.
KAN. Nay, but fear not.
True, I was drawn to you as on the morning
After our wedding; but a hint, a wave
Of hand, and I am gone even as I came.
Ay, swifter from your presence would I hasten
Than if in search of drink I neared a fountain
With noiseless tread, and in the very act
Espied a shrinking Naiad leave her bath.
RHOD. Remain!
KAN. No—not a breathing-span's delay,
If it distress you; and it does distress,
I feel it deep. This is the hour for that
Which has been christened in your lovely phrase
Your " inmost self-communing." I will not
Sully its sanctitude. Though Aphrodite,
Kind-smiling on this oversoon approach,
Threw me for your delight the golden girdle
She never gives away and scarcely lends,

I'd come some other time and hand it you.
RHOD. No more. That sounds too sweet and gives me fear;
For aye my nurse would tell me, " When a man
Draws near his wife with over-fond approach
Be sure he's done her feelings secret hurt."
KAN. There too I'm touched. I've done your feelings hurt.
I know your nature and as well I know
You cannot change your ways. Your father rules
Where Greek and Indian manners are immingled;
Your veil's a portion of your Being's self,
Yet must I ever pull and pluck at it
And would have wrenched it bodily yesterday.
Come then, I rue it, and I swear to you—
This drove me here—'twill not be done again.
[RHODOPE *laughs.*
For ne'er I longed as now that I might ward
Not just the grief that burrows to the bone
And leaves its scars to sharp the after-sting,
Nay, but to scare the tiniest shadow hence
That might o'ercast your soul with its annoy,
Though such a shadow's source should be myself.
I will watch o'er you as the trusty lashes
Watch o'er your eye; down comes their latch and bars
Not only sand-grains but the sunny beam
When over-ardent and too swiftly come.
RHOD. Too late! Too late!
KAN. What is too late, dear wife?
RHOD. I—No, I will not say it—I cannot say it;
Mayhap he'll guess it, and if he should guess,
I'll seek my knees, dumb, stripped of speech before him,
Pointing upon his sword-blade and my breast.
KAN. Some dream has given you fright?
RHOD. A dream? Oh no!
None was to waste on me; warning was lost
On my poor worth. The stone in crashing fall
May have its shadow for the eye to mark,

The sudden sword its flash, but on my head—
Kandaules, speak! I see—you wish a question!
Then question and be done!

KAN. I? Yes—why, yes!
But more than all—your hand!

RHOD. Withhold your touch!
No water rids you of the 'filing spot.

KAN. O Gyges!—Come, since thus your hand's refused me—
(And without that your cheek tells tale enough).
You're hot with fever; but the goodliest leech
Stands at the door. Why is it barred and bolted
When such a morn as all the trooping hours
Lade with their sweets, beggar-like knocks outside?
Quick, fling it back, and on the act you're healed!
[KANDAULES *is about to open it.*

RHOD. Halt! Ope more readily a charnel-vault!
Not darklier-browed the stainless god o' the sun
Averts his face from shattered urns of death
Than from the woman you have named your own.

KAN. Unhappy one!

RHOD. Speak! Was there in the chamber—
Speak at all costs——!

KAN. A murderer? No, why, no!
Come, ask yourself now, would I not have slain him?

RHOD. Ay, if you say him.

KAN. And I must have seen him.
The lamp had scarce been lit a moment since
And brightly burned.

RHOD. 'Twould seem so—yet I heard
A many various stirrings. Not from you
Nor yet from me they came.

KAN. The night is rife
With echoes and with startling curious noises
And sleepless ears hear much.

RHOD. There was a rustling.

KAN. A worm i' the wall!

RHOD. A clink as of a sword
Grazing on something.

KAN. Maybe. Where's the tone

That Nature, in a fit of mimic fun,
Has not embodied in some drollish beast
To serve a voice's turn? If you'll but tear
Your robe in two and mark the sound, I'll tell
What insect-buzz it is to the very life.

RHOD. I heard a sighing, too.

KAN. What, sighs from murderers?

RHOD. No, no! And there's the rub.

KAN. 'Twas the cool night-wind.
About your cheeks and mouth it would be playing
And sighed at breaking only on the walls.
I tell you there are trees that, like the stone
Which drinks the light of day and waits for darkness
To give it back, steep them in sounds and echoes,
And thus they babble, sing, and moan at night.

RHOD. You take it so? But wait—I've lost a dainty——

KAN. A precious stone perhaps? A diamond?
This one?

RHOD. You have it—You?

KAN. Who else? See there!

RHOD. Thanks, everlasting thanks, ye gods! Forgive
The doubting of a heart whose innocence
Misdeemed her trod and torn. Oh, ye are near
As light and air!

KAN. Erinnyes, down, you hounds!
There! (*giving her the jewel*).

RHOD. Take it to the temple-hoard! I owe
The gracious gods thank-offering opulent,
And chiefly Her, All-Linker of earth's love.
From golden baskets shall her doves be given,
To-day and ever, softest grains for picking;
From marble beakers shall they quench their thirst;
And you, Kandaules, you——

KAN. The youth will kiss,
When thinking of his maiden, his own hand
She pressed for greeting ere she took farewell;
The man needs something more.

RHOD. O happy day!
You hold your wife so dear? Ah, then I beg you
Forgive my close-hugged wrong. I inly fretted

'Twas pride in the possession more than love
Lay in the feeling that enchains you to me,
And your heart's leaning flame must have the grudge
Of others, if it be not wholly quenched.
I fear that now no more.

KAN. And nevermore
Shall come that fear on you. I know what thing
Set canker at your heart. You thought your sway
Trenched on by Gyges, and 'tis true enough
I passed full many a day with him for comrade,
And nigh turned huntsman since himself is one.
Yet that touched not your privilege's pale,
For that whereby the man and man are bonded
Is null for woman, needed at her side
As little as the war-mood for a kiss.
Yet though I could but name your fear a folly
I spare no means to bring you speedy healing,
For, hear my word—my favourite, Gyges, goes!

RHOD. What?

KAN. And to-day.

RHOD. Impossible!

KAN. Would that
Mislike you now? You seemed to wish it else.

RHOD. O fool, that this, in drunken rush of joy,
I could forget!

KAN. Why, what?

RHOD. Show me your hand!
'Twas he. He sudden stood before my eyes
As though his outline, fiery-limned in air,
Remained to trace him. Oh how terrible
The tallying proof! Your hand! He has the ring.

KAN. It is my very own.

RHOD. Speak, have you not
At some time laid it by since you have worn it?
Lost it or missed the thing some other way?

KAN. Unhappy soul! Why make flesh quail with shadows?

RHOD. He shirks my test! You're sending Gyges forth,
And on the instant like a miscreant?
And why?

KAN. I said not that. He goes himself.
RHOD. He goes himself? What drives him from among us?
KAN. I do not know, nor have I questioned him.
RHOD. You do not know? I'll tell you then the wherefore,
He's done you viler shame than e'er was plotted
And you must punish as you ne'er have punished.
KAN. Fie on those words, Rhodope! Past all doubt
He's noblest of the noble.
RHOD. Is he so?
How can you let him go without a tremor?
KAN. For this, that even the goodliest, all unwilling,
May spread in place of blessing secret curse.
RHOD. Is that his case? And has himself then felt it?
KAN. Well, if not that—his heart looks high, he aims
At large emprise, ay, and he dares the venture.
RHOD. You think that?
KAN. There's no throne too high for him,
And if he goes and keeps his reasons hid—
But mark me, crown in hand he'll be returning,
And tell us with a smile:— "This drove me forth."
RHOD. Even so?
KAN. Dear wife, the night's unnerved your mind,
The fright——
RHOD. Maybe.
KAN. You heard this here, that there——
RHOD. And naught to hear! Myself gives half belief,
For, now I mind me, sight as well was false.
You have not doffed the ring since wearing it,
You have not lost it, did not find it gone—
Yet still I had the thought—my glance was keen,
And it was morning and I saw all else,
'Twas missing from your hand. So it would seem
Sense tallies here with sense. The blinded eye
Bears out the blunted ear. Then pardon me
For giving you such hurt of heart, and grant
An hour alone to balance my tossed mind.
[KANDAULES *is about to speak.*

'Tis good, ay good! Forgive me, Sire, and go!
[*Exit* KANDAULES.

RHOD. None other 'tis than Gyges—that is clear,
And he has had the ring—that is still clearer,
The King suspects, must do so—that is clearest!
He's bound the appalling deed appallingly
T'avenge on him, yet suffers him escape.
Thereby one riddle needs another riddle
To solve it; and 'tis like to mad my brain
If it be kept in shroud. A husband sees
His wife defiled—defiled? Speak roundly—murdered!
Murdered! Nay more, condemned herself to murder
If this God-mocker pay not answering blood.
The husband is a monarch, bears the sword
Of Diké, nor need crave from the Erinnyes
Her borrowed dagger; knows 'tis holy duty
The hideous sin to punish, even if love
Spur not revenge; is bound before the gods
To yield their victim, if to me denied.
And yet this husband, yet this monarch draws
No sword, no dagger—lets the accursed fly!
But that shall have its thwart; not more than he
I lack for trusty servants; not as slave-girl,
As royal daughter came I in this house,
Ay, and my following was a royal one!
I'll summon them, old hearts of staunchest faith,
And bid them baulk the runagate of flight;
Then to Kandaules thus:— "Lo, here am I;
There is the favourite! Make your choice. This dagger
Will pierce myself unless your sword pierce him!"
[*Enter* LESBIA.

LESBIA. O Queen, do you forgive?

RHOD. Why, what, my child?
Your coming back to me? Do you, O you
Forgive me that I could have let you from me.
I seemed—myself I knew not what I did,
And yet I seem to think the King had told me
You went not loath; and ah, I had been forced

That night, that night to make him such denial
I'd not the heart to say another " no "!

LESBIA. Ah, then I'm free no more, and yet again
May count myself among your waiting-maidens?

RHOD. Nay, nay! As sister lay you on my breast!

LESBIA. Why, what has passed? So moved I ne'er have seen you.

RHOD. A hideous thing, a thing that has no name,
For when I come to name it, lo 'tis altered
And looks a deathlier horror than before!
Yea, Spawn of Night, that grins upon my eyes,
Your first-shown face methinks I could have kissed
Now that your second's bared in doubtful dark.

LESBIA. Can I do aught for you? The question's foolish,
I feel it—yet——

RHOD. My girl, you cannot murder,
And he who cannot murder can for me
Do nothing more——

LESBIA. Oh, Sovereign Lady!

RHOD. 'Tis so.
You fix me with wide eyes, you cannot grasp it
That such a word should come from out my mouth.
Yes, Lesbia, is it I, it is Rhodope
That warned you maids so oft, and checked your motion
To filch with meddling hand Death's dismal office
Though but a spider's life were set at stake.
I've not forgot it, but 'tis of the time
When in fresh morning dew I laved my limbs
And in the streams of sunshine basked them dry;
But now I bay for blood, now naught of me
Survives but what the gods will find is needful
That to avenge which time long since I was!

LESBIA. Your Consort then knows naught? A vengeancer
Can ne'er be lacking to the Queen of Lydia.

RHOD. It seems so—yet——Nay, I will know, and soon.
Go, Lesbia, and call me Karna hither.

LESBIA. You mean I am to bear him word from you?

RHOD. That's with the past.

LESBIA. But—but—your veil—you'll wish it!
RHOD. Nay, nay!
LESBIA. I shudder! Oh! 'Tis the first time.
[*Exit.*
RHOD. The friend he cannot sacrifice; therefore
He spares the wife. Else could he not endure it!
[LESBIA *returns with* KARNA.
Karna, you know the oath that you had sworn
What time your Lord, my King-descended Father,
Gave you his daughter at the Golden Gate.
Though still I sat upon my elephant,
Though deeply I was shrouded in my veil,
Yet well I noted everything that passed
Nor have forgot one word that then you spoke.
KARNA. Nor I, and hope I'll keep my faith's account.
RHOD. Then search out Grecian Gyges, bear him word
That I would see him.
KARNA. You!
RHOD. Bestir yourself
Lest so he should escape. Set on his tracks
If he has fled, and bring him here again.
Ere night has come before me he must stand!
KARNA. I shall deliver him, alive or dead. [*Exit.*
LESBIA. Say what is this? You think 'tis Gyges?
RHOD. Gyges!
LESBIA. He's done your feelings hurt?
RHOD. Done blasphemous insult
Upon the Holiest, brought the heaviest curse
From heaven upon my head, the selfsame curse
Which all the gods are loath to set at launch
Because it strikes alone the sinless man.
'Tis he that schools me murder.
LESBIA. Never he!
I swear it to you!
RHOD. How can you?
LESBIA. O Queen,
I too have had my lesson, and I know
That he would rather sunder soul from body
Than do you hurt.
RHOD. Even so?

LESBIA. I have for you
A word—his very message. Oh how bitter,
How bitter pain this word brought when I heard it!
Now 'tis half joy. I am to tell you from him
He's not so much as looked at me—He loves you!
Now ask yourself—is't possible?
RHOD. He loves me!
Then it is certain.
LESBIA. How?
RHOD. Come tell me, fool!
Can a man love what he has never seen?
If Gyges saw me—say, when did he see me?
[LESBIA *puts her hand before her eyes.*
Now say, as maiden, whether he must die!

ACT IV

The Queen's Apartment. RHODOPE *alone.*

RHODOPE. Oh for one moment of oblivion!
Why toss the riddle ever and forever?
'Tis solved—I know how soon! I should be busy
Even as my maids who slack the drag of time
By hearkening every tone and vying guesses
Which bird it was that sang each note, and whether
'Twas red and whether green. Pah, what a din!
Is Karna there with him? Still—all is still!
'Twas naught—I could have known. How am I altered!
When other have I asked a sound its whence?
I quailed at naught, I quailed not even before
The glow of fire, all one to me how red
It streamed at heaven, all one to me how threatening
It spread its yawn of blaze; I knew a ring
Of trusty watchers sightless round me set,
I knew they gave the King's beloved daughter
Buckler of blood and bones. At last—a step!
'Tis they! Ha, Karna is as shrewd as valiant.
Always I heard so; this day sees it proved.
Not yet! Nor ever, maybe! Nay, ye gods,
So hard of heart ye cannot be. My will
Is never that you reach me out the hand
To firm my footing on the abysm's brink,
My will is but to see who thrusts me down.
The more I ply my thought the less my power
To comprehend my lord. Sooth, I have heard
From veriest youth that the polluted woman
Is barred from life, and if through all the child
It sent its shudders, now I have the ground
For such a law; in my own heart I found it.
She cannot live, ay and she wills it not!

Has this for him alone no force, or will he
Slay the Accursed stealthily in hopes
Still to encloak from me his damned act?
Be thanked, Eternal Ones, that too may be.
If Karna then should find him flown and dead,
Should find the poniard cold in his hot breast,
I'll know whose hand it was that struck him earth wards
And nevermore shall ask where Gyges tarried.
[*Enter* LESBIA.

LESBIA. O Queen, he comes!
RHOD. I am prepared, and wait him.
LESBIA. And ranged behind him like a bolt of iron
A weaponed troop snaps to and locks him tight.
RHOD. I can believe that Karna knows his work.
LESBIA. And must it be?
RHOD. Or he or I; perchance
Both at a sweep.
LESBIA. Oh, oh, you make me dumb!
RHOD. Bid Karna now send message to the King
I beg him hither for a single word. [*Exit* LESBIA.
RHOD. Now, ye of Underneath, that put no outrage
In check, and yet avenge each several one,
Up, up, I say! Mount guard upon this hearth!
Be certain here of bloody sacrifice.
[GYGES *has meanwhile entered.*

GYGES. You sent to bid me to your presence, Queen.
RHOD. And you know why—you know it, for you tremble.
Can you deny the word? Your colour alters,
The heart that knocks your breast is plain to hear.
GYGES. Your lord—has he not, too, before you trembled?
Has not his colour, even as mine, been altered?
Has not his heart been stirred like mine and knocked?
Recall the moment of the great permission,
The first time that he dared behold your face,
Then ask—did he not all resemble me?
RHOD. You?
GYGES. Queen, I mean my words. His brain was dimmed,

He stood there in a dazzle, and as sense
Returned upon him, utterance went dumb,
And tearing crown from head as 'twere a wreath
Turned to a sudden wither in his hair,
He tossed it o'er his shoulder in disdain.

RHOD. He! Ah!

GYGES. You looked on him with kindly smile
At this; then came on him such boldened heart
He would have come anear by half a pace,
But lo, his knees were loosened under him,
They felt their homage owed a nobler service,
And ere you guessed he lay before you—thus!
[*Kneels down.*

RHOD. You dare?

GYGES. And what? Why thus it was. Scarce knowing
Your act's import, half with repelling motion,
And half perchance with the uplifter's gesture,
You stretched the hand which, tentatively, shyly,
He grasped; which then, e'en then, to tip of finger
Was short—withdrawn or ere he came to touch.
Did you not thus? Oh speak!

RHOD. Rise, rise, I say!

GYGES (*rising*). But him it smote like the heaven's thundery burst;
He felt that he had been until that hour
A shade of Erebus, cold, thinly-passioned,
A mere estray among the Things of Life
Quicked now with its first blood even as themselves.
He felt that all their laughing, all their weeping,
Their joying and their sighing—yea, their breathing
He had but aped nor ever dreamt wherefore
The breast of man forever swells and sinks.
Then burned he with desire for equal life
And sucked your darling image in with eyes
That else glassed all with level apathy
In changing drift, like a still sheet of water,
And scarcely now forgave the lids their quiver.
Thus as he lay before you drinking beauty

He took the gradual glow of softened fire,
Even as your own white hand what time at evening
You hold it to a flame—ah, but you leapt
Aback before your reddening countershine!

RHOD. No further!

GYGES. Ah, no further! Know I more?
All that he felt I understand and feel,
And that as full and flaming as himself.
But how he wooed and how the quest was won,
That is his mystery—one alone can have it
And this sole one is he and never I.
Now, then, you know why I was in a tremble,
A shiver of rapture 'twas that held me gripped,
A quake of holy dread that shook my frame
When thus I stood so sudden in your sight
And saw that Aphrodite has a sister.
Now say—for what end have you summoned me?

RHOD. For death.

GYGES. How say you?

RHOD. Is it not deserved?

GYGES. If you adjudge the doom—so must it be.

RHOD. And in this very hour.

GYGES. I am prepared.

RHOD. Not seized with shudders such as come on all men,
Such as must come on youth with double power?
Think you perchance this is not bitter earnest
Because a woman speaks your bloody sentence
And you've ne'er yet known woman but as mother?
Oh, do not hope that even the mildest-souled
Will alter it. The murder she can pardon,
Nay more, can for her murderer raise petition
If he has deigned her so much remnant breath;
Ay, but a shame, a blasting sacrilege
That fills her from the crown to the toe top-full
Of self-recoil—blood only blots that shame!
The more whole woman else, mere shrinking woman,
The more man bruises just that womanhood.

GYGES. Oh horror!

RHOD. Comes the shudder? Hear me out.
Stood you not now before me judged and doomed,

Guarded by shining swords before the door,
And, if you will or not, sure sacrifice
To Them of Underneath whom I've conjured,
Then would I ope, though with reluctant hand,
My very veins ere yet the sun had sunk
And wash myself in my own lustral blood.
For lo, the gods all stand with eyes avert
Though with a pity filled; the golden threads
Are snapped—those threads that knit me to the stars
And held me upright. Direly draws the dust
And if I wait and waver my new sister,
The toad, hops cosily into my chamber.

GYGES. O Queen, there's many a word that I could say,
Much fouling sand could shake from out my locks
That's flown thereon but in the stress of storm.
I will not do it. Believe but this alone—
Now, now, I see what I have done, and yet
It scarce was done before I felt the urge
To make atonement. If your lord, the King,
Had stood not in the path that points to Orcus
I long had been a shadow among shadows
And you been cleansed if yet unrecompensed.

RHOD. My lord baulked your intent although he knew——

GYGES. 'Twas naught. The unwonted crisis that beset him
Cost me the service of a free-willed death
But did not cheat you of your sacrifice.
Farewell; there'll be no sword of yours unclean.

RHOD. Stay—not by your own hand nor yet by murder,
But by your paramount arbiter you fall.
The King comes speedily to fix your fate.

GYGES. To dying men, no matter who they be,
One last request is granted free. You will
Be loath t' abridge my dead man's beggar-right,
I know you cannot do it. Then let me go!

[RHODOPE *makes a gesture of refusal.*

I have done all that in me lay. Then come
What is to come. I bear no whit of blame.

[*Enter* KANDAULES.

RHOD. (*to* KANDAULES). I did not err. There was i' the
sleeping chamber
A man concealed.
GYGES. Yes, King—the truth that I
But shadowed to you since the courage broke
To make confession. Now the veil is raised
And worthy death I stand before you here.
KAN. Gyges!
GYGES. Even so. With both these eyes of mine
I did a nameless thing such as my hands here
Could never overpass, could never equal,
Though I should draw the sword on you and her.
RHOD. 'Tis so.
GYGES. In sooth I knew not, ay, can swear it.
Women to me are strange; but as the boy
Thrusts at some wondrous bird a clutching hand
Rough with its crush, because its tender nature
He knows not, though his will was to caress,
E'en so I brought the Jewel of this world
To ruin, all unwitting what I did.
RHOD. His word is noble. Woe to him and me
That it is vain!
GYGES. When the Castalian fount,
Which god-delighting men have for their drinking,
And which from shuttling colours takes a glance
As though culled blossoms from a rainbow-garden
By Iris' very hands thereon were strown,
When in this fount, that from Parnassus springs,
A troubling stone is flung, it falls to boiling
And starts in wheeling turmoil hilly-high.
Then sings no more on earth the nightingale
Nor evermore the lark, and in the heights
A dumbness holds the Muses' holy choir,
And never knows the harmony returning
Till a grim stream wraps the foolhardy flinger
Gnashing him down into its lightless deeps.
Thus is it also with a woman's soul.
KAN. Gyges, I am no villain!
GYGES. Lord, you are
Rhodope's husband, shield and shelter both,

And must be her avenger.

KAN. More than all
I'm Man, and for the sacrilege myself
Committed, suffer no man else to die.

GYGES. King, what is saved by this?

KAN. Myself.

GYGES. He raves;
Give him no hearkening ear.

RHOD. My Lord and Consort,
What word was that? I scarce believe myself
If you repeat it not.

KAN. You speak for me.
You shall not plead excuse for me—you shall
Tell all just as it came.

RHOD. 'Tis so? Ye gods,
Be merry! I have railed, yet knew not *this*.

KAN. Speak, Gyges. [*Exit.*

GYGES. Queen, if you but had the knowledge
How he extolled you ever, and how dull,
How brutish dull, each flaming word I heard
Because the birds that from the bushes rustled
Scaping my arrow's range the while he spoke
Allured my eyes—if you should tell yourself
How sorely such a listless childlike bearing
He took for signal of a hid mistrust
And a half-given belief, although it sprang
From vagrant mood—how sore it must have stung
him;
Had you but seen us both—nay only once,
When side by side we roamed and loitered on
Amid the forest, he in all his glow,
I in my chill indifference staring stockish
For coloured pebbles scattered on the earth
The while his fingers pointed to a sunrise;
Oh! sure I know your look again were mild,
For he was like a priest in whom a flame
Irradiant burns, and who, his god to honour,
Would kindle it within another's bosom,
And when o'ermastered, passionately heedless
He bares of veil the Holy Mysteries

That stupored senses thus more swiftly waken
And idols false meet surer disenthronement,
Fails he so sore that he be not reprieved?

RHOD. (*with a gesture of repulse*). He gave his right of husband to your keeping?

GYGES. Name it not thus!

RHOD. No need then at your wine
To seize upon his hand and in the act
To draw therefrom the ring, as I had thought it—
He gave you back the ring himself; you came,
Perchance so bold, along with him?

GYGES. How can
Your heart believe it, Queen?

RHOD. Your years are youthful—
Your thought's too noble——

GYGES. Was I then his villein,
And has he e'er required that such I be?
Nay, nay, O Queen, nothing extenuate;
Your word of doom stands fast; and deem it not
A heartless word, 'tis mild. I took the way
That deep I feel I never should have taken,
But I have borne my curse with me as well.
I was grown ripe for death because I knew
That every good which life can e'er bestow
Was squandered waste, and if it chanced that night
I found him not, and o'er the hearth's pollution
My swift-let blood poured not its cleansing wash,
The blame is not on me—I courted him.
Oh, had I borne my purpose through and dared him,
Naught but an echo in your soul would now
Recall a dying shudder at the murderer
And make your breathing all the sweetlier drawn!
Ay, but your lord had stood revealed as saviour
Nor ever been before so fiery-kissed.

RHOD. And things had happened that would fearfully
Uplift the veil and show us that the gods
Lean not upon the arm of man for vengeance,
When such a guilt as never finds atonement,
Being a thing of darkness, stains the world.
But they are gracious, for this hell-deed has

In vain enwrapped itself in utter blackness;
'Spite all, it blazes through. Water will seek
No fiery transmutation when the mouth
Of thirst is stretched to drink it, nor will fire
Wane in extinction when the breath of hunger
Blows o'er it on the hearthstone—nay, oh nay,
The elements need not to tell the tidings
That Nature to her wrathful depths is fevered
Since in a woman she has suffered hurt.
We know the thing that happed!

GYGES. We know as well
What is to happen still. Only forgive!
[*Is about to go.*

RHOD. Stop! That no more!

GYGES. What other can I do?

RHOD. You must now slay him.

GYGES. Ha!

RHOD. You must—and I——
I must thereafter be your wife.

GYGES. O Queen!

RHOD. Now go.

GYGES. What, slay him?

RHOD. When you say to me,
" You are a widow now," I answer you
" You are my husband now."

GYGES. Have you not seen
How he departed hence, not for himself
Spoke any word, but gave the charge to me?
And I—I am to—— No!

RHOD. You must do this
As I must make demand. We both can make
No question if the task be hard or light.

GYGES. But if he were not husband he is friend,
None stands his better there. And can I kill him
For being friend in all too dear degree?

RHOD. You struggle still, but all in vain.

GYGES. What should
Compel me if your charm could not compel?
I love you; I am strange-subdued as though
I came to earth seized with a stiffening cramp

That bent to suppleness before your gaze.
My senses, erewhile numb like drowséd watchmen,
Had never seen nor heard; now they arouse
Each other's life, o'ermastered with their bliss
And clambering upon you; round about you
All forms are merged and melted, once so sharp
And boldly-lined they almost tore the eye
Like clouds before the radiant lines of morning,
And like a dizzied man who sees the abysm
And fears the sucking fall, I could outstretch
My hand for yours, yea, cling around your neck
Ere gulped into unbottomed nothingness.
But with no drop, no smallest, of his blood
Could I be won to buy that loftiest seat—
In rapture's maddest height I'd not forget him!

RHOD. 'Tis true you can refuse what I desire—
Then leave me!

GYGES. Queen, what's in your heart?

RHOD. A work
Of silent resolution and more silent
Fruition—Go!

GYGES. You mean—you mean——

RHOD. Perchance.

GYGES. You could?

RHOD. Misdoubt it not. I can and will.

GYGES. Now by the gods who hold their thrones aloft
And the Erinnyes, Listeners of the Depths,
That may not be and ne'er shall come to pass!

RHOD. Ho, thus you speak?

GYGES. You'll wake me out of slumber—
Tell me you will—when he appears in dreams
And mocks his death-wound, ever, ever smiling
Till my hair starts on end?

RHOD. No more! No more!

GYGES. And you will press a kiss upon my lips,
That in my anguish come no sudden stab
To tell me why I did it—You turn away
As though the very thought set you to shudders?
Swear first that oath!

RHOD. I swear to be your wife.

GYGES. Pah! Why the question? I'm not conqueror yet.
RHOD. It means a combat then?
GYGES. A combat, Queen.
You hold me not so light to think I'd murder?
I challenge him to fight unto the death.
RHOD. And if you fall?
GYGES. Send no curse after me,
I can naught else.
RHOD. Do I not fall with you?
GYGES. But if I come again?
RHOD. Beside the altar
You find me, and prepared for either chance,
Prepared as well to lay my hand in yours
As grasp the dagger and dissolve the bond
That holds me knit unto the conqueror
If it be he.
GYGES. Before the sun is sunk
It is decided. Then farewell.
RHOD. Farewell—
And if it give you joy learn one thing more:—
You never had allured me from my home
To wrong me thus.
GYGES. Rhodope! Ah, you feel it?
That means I had known hotter jealousy
And keener envy, had been given more
To fear, since I'm a lesser man than he.
And yet it gives me joy that thus you feel,
And is enough for me, more than enough. [*Exit.*
RHOD. Now bridal garb and deathly shroud—come on!
[LESBIA *rushes in and throws herself at* RHODOPE'S *feet.*
LESBIA. O Gracious One—forgive! My thanks, my thanks!
RHOD. (*lifting her up*). I think you will not thank me, hapless child,
Yet—in the end! Yes, Lesbia, in the end!

ACT V

SCENE I

Enter KANDAULES, THOAS *following.*

KANDAULES. Where'er I go you're hard at heels. What would you?
No heart to open speech with me, old man,
Because I was a trifle rough with you?
Speak—on with what you'd say. I'll keep my soul
In patience and give ear though you should need
The length of time that turns a grape from green
Into the purple ere you've reached the end.
THOAS. Sire, have I ever yet accused a man?
KAN. No, Thoas.
THOAS. Have I slurred a man's good name?
KAN. Why, surely not.
THOAS. Or picked up heated words,
Such as wroth lips are like to drop on earth,
To fling them in your ear and fan their flame?
KAN. Never.
THOAS. Good; then I know at seventy years
I'll not do what I have not done at twenty,
Since more than fifty years I've served your house.
KAN. I know it, trusty henchman.
THOAS. Earth brings forth
And ceases not, all one to her if kings
Be slain or crowned. She suffers not the trees
To wither out nor berries to run sapless,
And none the more she holds her fountains back
If one should chance to give her blood for drink.
KAN. That's true as well.
THOAS. Ay, true. All would remain
As now, I think, so far as touches me.
For there's the luck of slaves like us, that we
Fret little at a red moon in the heavens,

And that more coolly than the greedy dogs
Waiting in hope for tit-bits they may snap,
We watch the sacrifice nor ask in dread
If there be good or evil prophesied.

KAN. Greybeard, what would you say?

THOAS. Your father had me
Always about him, none the less if he
Went banqueting than if he took the field;
I dared not be remiss, to-day I reached
His goblet and to-morrow shield and spear.
I too it was prepared his funeral-pyre
And gathered up with my old stiffened fingers
His handful of white dust in the brown urn,
For such was his behest—and why was this?

KAN. The grape is turned to red by now.

THOAS. You're like him,
Maybe—I've ne'er yet seen you draw the sword.
He drew it oft and gladly, nor at times
With any ground, I grant it if you will,
And yet 'twas good, maybe you're fully like him;
God give his fate be yours.

KAN. Is it not mine?

THOAS. Who knows? I reckon in its end as well.
Forgive me, Sire; I have a laggard brain,
An understanding slow, and dull device,
Who calls me fool insults me not thereby.
But sturdy men have come to me ere now
To seek advice, and when I hemmed and hawed
They said to me:—" The simplest aged man
Who counts his seventy years and keeps his senses
Has greater wisdom in a hundred things
Than even the shrewdest who is still a youth."
Well, then, I think I keep my senses still,
So hearken to me.

KAN. Why, I do.

THOAS. And ply not
The rack for reasons. Be not overhasty
To think me wrong, although I shut my lips,
Because a " why " of thus and thus much drams
Is lacking me when you would weigh my word.

It's true enough, if birds refuse to fly
As pleases you, when questioned by your seer,
That you can launch a single shot from bow
And scatter them, as many have done in wrath.
But does the ill-luck they portended come
The less for that? Then do not say to me,
"What would you? He is valiant, good, and true!"
I know't myself, nay more—would swear the same,
Yet all the more I speak my warning word:—
Be on your guard with Gyges! [KANDAULES *laughs.*
Ah, I thought it.
I tell you once again—be on your guard!
Yet take my words aright. I say as well
He'll never stretch his hand to grasp your crown,
He'll spend his very latest drop of blood
In your defence, and yet he is for you
More dangerous than all who yesterday
With looks and words were hatching to your hurt
Their plots. Oho, they'll never do you harm
As long as he's not here. Then get his riddance
Soon as you can, for if he bides much longer
And, wearing all the garlands he has won,
Goes up and down among them as he does,
There's much can happen.

KAN. That means?

THOAS. Why, I see it.
They whisper and compare, they shrug their shoulders,
And clenching fists, have a sly nod with each other.
You've given them all too sore offence, and if
The Greek should feel some morning when he wakens
His step go sudden-stumbling o'er a crown
Set by some hand at night to catch his feet,
Should he still spurn it?—Is the man a fool?
He does not rob you of it, that's enough.
Your heir he can be and your heir he will be,
His stars ascend, you do not dream how high,
Else would they mock him for a zither-twanger
And they'd believe, as I myself believe,
That only birds possess the songful throat

Whose claws are clipped by shears that know their work,
But now they deem him, since he's apt at song,
If not yet Phoebus' self, at least his son.

KAN. That mazes you? Why, he has conquered them.
How could sheer mortal be their conqueror?

THOAS. Still, still! Yet this much stands, he's good and true.
Then hear my words and all may yet go well
Unless the gods should send a chastisement
And you next year make them and us at one.
[*Enter* GYGES.
He comes. Was this vain talk? Sire, do not smile.
'Tis just on walls saltpetre-crystals form,
Then wherefore not the salt o' the time on me?
[*He retreats into the background.*

KAN. You've touched my quick more nearly than you think—
Well, Gyges?

GYGES. Sire, I have been seeking you.

KAN. Not more than I've been seeking you. Say on,
What brings you here? You're dumb and turn away.
Whate'er it be I have the strength for much.

GYGES. Oh, had you but received my sacrifice!

KAN. I ne'er will rue that thus I have not done,
But had it been received, what profit there?
That night suspicion inextinguishable
Took kindle in her bosom from your sigh.
But cease this feud of conscience. Where's the man
That is a man and had not sighed like you?

GYGES. No blessed day was that on which the King
Of Lydia first met with Grecian Gyges.

KAN. I curse it not.

GYGES. Your own hand had the power
To shield you from that couched and glowering tiger,
And I by launching my unwanted dart
Became not your deliverer from destruction
But robber of your master-shot.

KAN. 'Tis true.
I had him fully marked and was prepared,
But when I saw your eyes in eager glitter,
The glow upon your cheeks, the heave of breast,
I banished from my lips a quiet smile
And gave you thanks.
GYGES. Ever this noble mind.
E'en when I dreamt not of it! Can I then?
KAN. And the first glance told me another thing,
That should there come on me a greater peril
You'd do the deed again and make it braver.
And if it has not come you bear no guilt.
GYGES. Sire, speak no more. 'Tis even as you say,
Against a single hair from off your head
I would have staked my blood—yet now—yet now—
So wills the curse, I must demand your life.
KAN. My life?
GYGES. Even so, if she is not to die.
The sun already dips to his descent,
And if your eye still sees the evening star
Then hers shall never see it, nevermore.
KAN. Then if you kill not me she kills herself?
GYGES. She does. How else could I stand thus before you?
KAN. No other sacrifice requites her vengeance?
GYGES. I offered her the dearest, but in vain.
KAN. Ah, then she will refuse me even farewell!
GYGES. I fear she'll flee your face into the grave.
KAN. No more, then. Take my life.—You start aback?
GYGES. So willing with the gift?
KAN. Who does a sin
Does penance too. Who smiles not in atonement
Makes no atonement. Am I known so ill
And held so light by you that such a word
Astounds, nay more, affrights you? Where's my heart
That I should force her with her rosy fingers,
Too tender even for plucking of a flower,
To stretch them for a dagger and to prove
If she be skilled to find her heart?

GYGES. This too?
Flinging the very garment's shelter back
And offering breast yourself?
KAN. I show the path
That's nearest to the goal, and make it smooth
That when you stand again before her sight
There'll be at least one thing in me to praise.
Here is the rushing fount of life you seek,
You have the key yourself, then ope the lock!
GYGES. Not for the world!
KAN. For her, my friend, for her!
[GYGES *makes a gesture of refusal.*
Nay, I bethink me now. You wished to-day
With your own hand to spill your youthful blood.
Maybe I too can muster will; then go
And take to her my latest-breathed farewell.
'Tis even as though I now were stretched on earth.
GYGES. No, no! I came to fight.
KAN. Oho, the pride!
In fight with me you cannot be defeated,
Eh, friend?
GYGES. You know me better.
KAN. That as well!
Should I be conqueror even there remains
No less the other. Is not that the scent
The aloe sheds? It is; so soon the wind
Carries it from the garden. 'Tis unclosed
Only when night is near. The time is come.
GYGES. The ring—oh, oh!
KAN. You mean 'twere better left
Unravished in its charnel? True it is.
Rhodope's dread presentience was no lie,
Nor was your shudder empty monishment.
Not for a game nor the mad pranks o' the fool
Its metal has been welded, and perchance
There hangs on it the whole world-destiny.
Methinks 'tis given me to dare the vision
Of time's most ancient gulfs, and see the fight
The young gods fought with the hoar gods of eld.
Zeus, hurled aback full oft, comes climbing on

Toward the gold seat o' the Father, in his hand
The sickle of horror, and behind him creeps
A Titan to the attack, sore-bowed with fetters.
Why is he not perceived of Kronos? Lo
He's manacled and maimed and downward hurled!
Wears he the ring? Gyges, he wore the ring
And Gaia's self had handed him the ring!

GYGES. Then curséd be the man that brought it to you.

KAN. And why? You did the right, and had I been
Made of your mould it had not worked its lure,
In silence had I given it back to night
And all would now be as it was erewhile.
Then seek not on the passive tool's account
To bargain for my sin. The guilt is mine.

GYGES. But ah, what guilt!

KAN. How deep 'tis hers to say,
And keen I feel I have been sore at fault.
What strikes me strikes me only as is meet.
The plain word of my age-ennobled servant
Taught me a thing. One should not always ask
" What's this or that? " but sometimes " What's its import? "
I know for very truth the time is coming
When all will think as I do. Say, what virtue
Inheres in veils, in crowns or rusty swords
That is eternal? But the weary world
O'er things like these is sunken into sleep;
Things that she wrested in her latest throe
And holds to fast. Who'd plunder her thereof
Wakes her. Then let that man first search himself
If he be strong enough to hold her bound
When, jolted half awake, she lays about her,
And rich enough to offer her aught higher,
If she be loath to let her trinket go.
Herakles was the man, but I am not.
Too proud to be his heir in lowly mind
And far too weak to be his peer in deed,
I've undermined the ground that held me firm
And now its gnashing vengeance draws me down.

GYGES. Nay, nay!

KAN. 'Tis thus nor can be otherwise.
The world has need of sleep as you and I
Need ours; she grows like us and waxes strong
When she would seem the prey of death and fools
Are moved to mirth. Yes, when a man lies prone,
The arms erewhile so busy hanging slack,
The eyes imprisoned fast and closed the mouth,
Whose lips are knitted in convulsive twitch
Retaining still perchance a withered roseleaf
As though 'twere greatest treasure—that would give
A sight to raise the laugh of him who wakes
And looks upon it. But were such a man,
Some being born upon a stranger star
And quite unwitting of our human wants,
To come and cry at you—" Here's fruit and wine,
Arise, eat, drink! " What were you like to do?
Why this, unless you choked him, ere you knew it,
With a half-conscious grip and crushing hug,
You'd answer:—" This is more than meat and drink! "
And slumber calmly on until the morning
That summons not the one and not the other,
Nay, but all mortals into freshened life.
Just such a meddling mar-peace was myself.
Now I am caught between Briareus' hands
And he will grind the insect that would sting.
Then, Gyges, howsoe'er the wave of life
May lift you (and be sure 'twill rear your fate
Still higher than you think) be bold of faith
And do not tremble even before a crown;
This only—never break the sleep o' the world.
And now——

GYGES. The sun goes down. The thing must be.

KAN. Thoas! [*He takes off his crown.*

THOAS. What means this, Sire?

KAN. I think you wished
To see me fight. Be glad, then, for I do it.
But this for payment—keep the crown in ward
And give't to whoso of the twain survives.
(*To* GYGES.) If it be you, I grudge it not, and men

Will see it on your brow with joy—Come, come!
You say you'd never take it? Fie, oh fie!
'Twould only lapse upon a lesser man.

GYGES. Sire, swear you'll do your honest part in fight.

KAN. 'Tis mine to show her I'll not lightly lose
So dear a loveliness. I swear it then.
And you?

GYGES. She lives and dies with me. I must.
And though at every cut and thrust I'm thinking
" Liefer by far a kiss! " yet none the more
I'll slack the force of any blow.

KAN. Then give
Your hand for this once more.—Now be for me
A tiger. I for you a lion, and this
The wildwood where we oft have led the chase.

[*They draw.*

GYGES. There's one thing yet. Shame held it back.
She means
To wed with me if you be overcome.

KAN. Ah, now I understand her!

GYGES. On your guard!

[*A fight, during which they disappear to the left.*

THOAS. He falls! The last o' the Heraclids is fallen!

[*Exit in their direction.*

SCENE 2

The Temple of Hestia. Evening: torches are lit. In the centre a statue of the goddess. RHODOPE *appears from the right in solemn procession, with her* LESBIA, HERO, *and* KARNA.

RHODOPE. Karna, the funeral-pyre—'tis being built?

KARNA. 'Tis built ere now.

[RHODOPE *paces into the temple and kneels before the statue of the goddess.*

HERO. She speaks of funeral-pyres
Instead of bridal-chambers?

LESBIA. What, amazed?
There must be first one dead within this place
Or ever in this place there be a bride.

HERO. I tremble, Lesbia. She questioned me,
When I was tiring her, if in our garden
Were growing poison-berries——
LESBIA. What?
HERO. And if
I might not go and bring her some of them,
For every one she said she'd give a pearl
Though there should be a hundred; but with speed
It must be done.
LESBIA. And you?
HERO. I answered no,
And thereupon she smiled and said, " I'm like
To think it. I shall show you them to-morrow."
And yet I thought it strange.
LESBIA. And strange it is.
HERO. Thereon she sent me from her, but I spied
And saw her take a poniard fine of point
As though for test, no other word could name it,
And scratch her arm.
LESBIA. Hero!
HERO. 'Tis true. There came
Red blood as well.
LESBIA. Oh horror!
HERO. Sooth it is
She honours equally with ours strange gods
We have no knowledge of; and so perchance
'Tis some dark rite.
LESBIA. No, no! Where sounds the flute
And where the pipe? Who sings the song of Hymen?
Where is the band of dancers? I was blind!
She has gone forth to turn her home no more.
Queen, hearken to my prayer—relent! . . . And is
A feast prepared?
HERO. No. Oh, to be in the dark!
LESBIA. Then curses on the pride of heart that held me,
This very day of all, so far from her!
And now—O Goddess, she is Thine this hour,
Incline her heart, I cannot do so more!
HERO. Yes, Pure and Chaste and Holy, do this thing . . .
And is't not strange as well that she should choose

No more the ever-blithesome Aphrodite
For witness, but the stern-faced Hestia
Before whose gaze the greenest garland dries?

LESBIA. Oh, oh, it means the Thing most dread of all!
[*Enter* GYGES.

HERO. Gyges!

LESBIA. Oh take him! Only—do it not!

GYGES. I feel as though myself had lost the blood
That streamed from out his veins. I am death-cold.

HERO. How pale his seeming is!

GYGES. There is the altar—
But at another have I sought for her——
And there her maids are standing—there is she——
What means it all? [*Enter* THOAS.

THOAS. I offer you the crown.

GYGES. It passes to the Lydians, not to me.

THOAS. I brought it to the Lydians ere to you,
And as their herald stand before you now.

THE PEOPLE (*without*). Hail, Gyges, Hail!
[RHODOPE *rises and turns round.*

THE PEOPLE (*pressing in*). Gyges, our King, all hail!

THOAS. This shouting is no thing for pride. The neighbours
Have fallen on the land, and 'tis your task
To lead them.

GYGES. What?

THOAS. 'Twas just as I had thought.
He was too mild; there's not a soul that feared him,
And now they're here. [GYGES *puts on the crown.*

GYGES. 'Tis I that pay his debt.

RHOD. (*who has been slowly approaching* GYGES). Gyges, your own is first to pay.

GYGES. O Queen,
Be you the prize that draws me with its lure
When far and wide I've crushed my foes in rout.

RHOD. Nay, nay! You gain no hour of grace from me.
We cannot go before my Father's presence;
Then come with me and stand at Hestia's altar,
And give to me before her countenance
The hand's eternal bond I give to you.

GYGES. Had you but seen how he took leave of life
You'd call't a holy thing, this awed recoil
That sanctions not the mere touch of your garment,
Till I have done this thing for him. There's none
Had more o' the rich world's goods than he, and yet
He went therefrom as others come therein.
RHOD. If with such noble soul he trod the way
To dusky death, that realm where none renews
The stain of sin, then with a glow at heart
I'll meet him, though no more than on the threshold.
Yea, I will stoop and make my hands a cup
To draw for him from Lethe; but myself
Shall never taste the beatific drink.
But you—I warn you—make an end!
GYGES. So be it.
Yet this I swear to thee, beloved Shade,
I shall away as soon as e'er 'tis done.
RHOD. I too have sworn to do a thing.
GYGES. O Queen,
The man whose hand defers a cup so brimming
With every bliss, as mine does now, though but
For one short hour, that man has won it well.
RHOD. Hush, hush! Your feet are in a holy place!
[*They walk to the altar.*
O Hestia, Thou Guardian of the Flame
Whose fire consumes the thing it cannot cleanse,
I give this youth my thanks that once again
I dare appear before thy countenance.
And as the folk exalteth him to King,
Be witness thou, I raise him to my lord.
[*She gives* GYGES *her hand.*
And you—regard as wedding-gift the crown
Now flinging from your head its lordly sparkle,
But give to me the Dead Man's Ring for pledge.
GYGES. Nay, that the King still bears upon his finger.
RHOD. Already then it has its fitting place.
[*She frees* GYGES' *hand.*
And now step back. Be faithful to your vow
As I keep faith with mine. My stain is purged,
For none has seen me save for whom 'twas meet.
But now I disunite me (*stabs herself*) thus from you!

HEROD AND MARIAMNE

A TRAGEDY IN FIVE ACTS

TRANSLATED BY

L. H. ALLEN

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

KING HEROD.
MARIAMNE, *his Queen.*
ALEXANDRA, *her Mother.*
SALOME, *Sister of the King.*
SOEMUS, *Governor of Galilee.*
JOSEPH, *Viceregent in the absence of* HEROD.
SAMEAS, *a Pharisee.*
TITUS, *a Roman Captain.*
JOAB, *a Courier.*
JUDAS, *a Jewish Captain.*
ARTAXERXES, MOSES, JEHU } *Servants; also other Servants.*
SILO, *a Citizen.*
ZERUBABEL, PHILO, *his Son* } *Galileans.*
A ROMAN COURIER.
AARON and five other JUDGES.
THREE KINGS FROM THE EAST, *afterwards given the added title of "holy" by the Christian Church.*

PLACE: Jerusalem. TIME: The Birth of Christ.

HEROD AND MARIAMNE

ACT I

SCENE I

A Castle on Zion. A large Audience-Chamber. JOAB, SAMEAS, ZERUBABEL *and his Son* PHILO, TITUS, JUDAS, *and many others. Enter* HEROD.

JOAB (*advancing towards the King*). I'm back again.
HEROD. I'll speak with you anon.
Announce the weightiest first!
JOAB (*retreating: aside*). The weightiest!
I had a kind of notion 'twere to learn
Whether my head sits shoulder-tight or not.
HEROD (*beckoning to* JUDAS). How is it with the fire?
JUDAS. With the fire?
Know you already what I came to tell?
HEROD. At midnight it broke out; I was the first
To mark it, and the first to call the watch.
Am I at fault, or did I wake yourself?
JUDAS. It is extinguished. (*Aside.*) Ha, then it is true
The mummer dogs the town-ways in disguise
When others are asleep! Then bridle tongue!
A chance may prick it blind against his ear!
HEROD. I saw when all was in a reel of flames
A woman, young, through the window of a house;
She seemed quite sense-numbed. Was this woman saved?
JUDAS. She'd none of it.
HEROD. She'd none of it?
JUDAS. By Heaven,
She made defence against the force essayed
To bear her off; she laid about with hands

And feet; she clutched and clung to the bed
On which she sat, shrieking " that very hour
She'd chosen for a death by her own hands.
And now that death was come by lucky chance! "

HEROD. She must have been a maniac.

JUDAS. Possibly
The poignancy of pain gave her the wrench.
Her husband had just died the moment ere then.
His corpse, still warm, was lying in his bed.

HEROD (*aside*). That tale's in point: I'll tell't to Mariamne
And fix her eyes i' the very telling! (*Aloud.*) This woman
Has had no child belike; in the other case
The child shall be my care; as for herself,
Let her have rich and princely burial.
I feel she was among all women queen.

SAMEAS (*advancing towards* HEROD). A burial? I protest the thing can't be,
Or, at the least, not in Jerusalem,
For it is written——

HEROD. Are you not known to me?

SAMEAS. You've had ere now a chance to make acquaintance;
I was the tongue once of the Sanhedrim
When it was dumb before you.

HEROD. Sameas,
I hope you know me too. Hard on the heel
You have pursued the youngling, and were lief
To make the hangman richer by the head
Of that same youngling. I forgive your deeds
As man and King. Your neck still carries yours.

SAMEAS. If for the grace that bade you leave it me
I dare not use it, here it is! That were
A worse mischance than loss for good and all.

HEROD. Why did you come? I never saw you here
Till now within these walls.

SAMEAS. That's just the reason
You see me here to-day. You may have thought
It was through fear of you. I fear you not!

Not even now, when many learnt to fear you
Who till this time—I mean up till the death
Of Aristobulus—had no fear of you;
And now at offered opportunity
To give you proof I have a grateful heart,
I grasp the chance, and warn you solemnly
Against a deed that the Lord God abhors.
This woman's bones unhallowed are accursed,
She has rejected rescue heathen-wise;
No less the act than had she killed herself.
And then——

HEROD. Some other time!
(*To* ZERUBABEL.) From Galilee!
Zerubabel as well who once——Be welcome!
Yourself's to blame I've seen you not till now.

ZER. 'Tis a high honour, King, you know me still.
(*Pointing to his mouth.*) But then of course these teeth, these mighty twins
That make me a blood-cousin to the boar——

HEROD. The look of my own face will I forget
Sooner than his who's served me trustily.
When I was brigand-hunting in your land,
My sharpest sleuth-hound you! Why come you now?

ZER. (*pointing to his son*). Small cause enough. This Philo here's my son.
Soldiers you need, and I—well none need I.
This one's a Roman. By some oversight
A Hebrew daughter gave him to the world.

HEROD. From Galilee comes to me naught but good.
I'll have you summoned later.
[ZERUBABEL *retires with his son.*

TITUS (*advancing*). A cheat's fraud
I have discovered forces——

HEROD. Out with it!

TITUS. The dumb speak!

HEROD. Riddle not!

TITUS. Your halberdier
Who, companied with one of my centurions,

[1] *See* note 1, p. 178.

Last night was standing guard at your bed-chamber——

HEROD (*aside*). The man whom Alexandra, my wife's mother,
Enlisted in my service——

TITUS. He's not dumb,
Though not a soul but seems to think so of him.
In dreaming he has found his voice and cursed.

HEROD. In dreaming!

TITUS. Yes, he fell asleep on guard,
And my centurion had no mind to wake him,
Thinking his duty's scope made no exaction,
Because he is not drafted with his cohort.
But his sharp eye was on him, if he fell
To catch him that your rest be not disturbed,
Since it was early and you lay asleep.
While he does this the dumb one sudden starts
A-murmuring, and calls aloud your name,
And couples it with a most fearsome curse.

HEROD. And this centurion suffers no delusion?

TITUS. If so, he must himself have fallen asleep,
An omen, for the eternal city's future,
Worse than the bolt of thunder which of late
Blasted the She-wolf on the Capitol.

HEROD. My thanks to you—and now——
[*Dismisses all except* JOAB.
Ay, so it stands!
Traitors in my own house, open defiance
From Pharisaic scum, the more unblushing
Since I dare not deal chastisement unless
I'm mad enough to turn fools into martyrs;
And from those Galileans some scant love,
No, a self-interested hanging-on,
Since I'm the Bogy of the Shining Sword
That from the distance scares their rabble-dregs.
And—this man brings me certain news of ill;
He was too hasty-eager to announce it.
For even he, though my own body-slave,
Delights in my chagrin if he but knows
I must don mask as though I saw it not.

(*To* JOAB.) The news from Alexandria!
JOAB. I had speech
With Antony.
HEROD. O prologue marvellous!
Had speech with Antony! I'm used to see
My couriers to his audience vouchsafed.
You are the first who finds himself compelled
To reassure me he was privileged thus.
JOAB. A privilege hardly won! I was repulsed,
Obdurately repulsed!
HEROD (*aside*). A sign he stands
Still better with Octavian than I thought!
(*Aloud.*) That shows you picked the right hour clumsily.
JOAB. I picked each single one o' the twenty-four
That make the total day. Whate'er was doing
I budged not from the spot, never a foot,
Even when the soldiers offered me some morsel,
And, when I spurned their bounty, vented japes:—
" He'll only eat the leavings of the cat
And what the dogs have tattered with their jaws! "
At last I had success——
HEROD. Some cleverer man
Had won forthwith——
JOAB. In gaining audience.
It was now night, and the first notion forced
Upon my mind was that I had been summoned
To lengthen out his gibing soldiers' jest.
For, as I entered, there before my eyes
A ring of cushion-sprawling drinkers lay;
But he with his own hand filled me with a goblet
And called out to me— " Drain this to my health! "
I courteously declined, whereat he said:—
" If killing yonder fellow were my mood
I'd merely need for but an eight-days' space
To have him at my board, and pile thereon
The tribute paid me by the earth and ocean.
He'd sit an-idling, peak away from famine,
And swear in dying he'd a bellyful! "

HEROD. Yes, yes, they know our breed! It must be altered.
What Moses merely bade, to shield this folk
From a backsliding to its old calf-cult,
Though *he* was not a fool, such law this folk
Holds fatuous as a self-sufficient end;
So sick men cured still use the healing drug
As though their food and physic were the same.
This must—— Continue!

JOAB. I was soon assured
I had mistook my man, for he dismissed
All State-affairs while cups were going round,
Appointed magistrates and duly ordered
The sacrifice to Zeus, consulted augurs,
Spoke with the couriers fast as e'er they came,
Not me alone. Oh, a rare sight he made!
A slave behind him with his ear acock,
A tablet and a stylus in his hand,
Was scribbling down—absurdly solemn owl!
Whatever crank escaped his tippler-mood.
And on the morning after, so I learnt,
He reads the contents through, his head aburst
With drunkard-dregs, and holds his words so true
That—hear the latest oath they say he swore—
With his own fist he'd choke his very windpipe
Had he the night before in fuddled fit
Made a fool's freakish present of the world
He dubs his own, and thereby forfeited
His right to one sole single place thereon.
Whether, then too his walk's a zigzag waddle,
As when at night he seeks his bed, I know not;
But to my thinking, both are on all fours.

HEROD. Thou'rt conqueror, Octavian! Soon or late;
That's all the question. Well?

JOAB. When at long last
The turn had come to me and I delivered
The letter for him that I bore with me,
He then and there, instead of opening it,
Tossed it contemptuous to his secretary,
Bade his cup-bearer bring a certain picture

Which I should thoroughly scan, and say to him
Whether I found the likeness good or no.

HEROD. It was the likeness of——

JOAB (*with sinister malice*). Aristobulus,
The High-Priest drowned a trifle suddenly.
A long time since your royal Consort's mother,
Queen Alexandra, who's had doings with him,
Had sent it; but 'twas swallowed ravenously
As though he'd ne'er set eyes on it before.
Stock-still I stood, mutely confused. He spoke
When he saw this—" The lamps here burn too dim! "
Then, stretching out his hand toward your letter,
Plunged it in flame and let it flicker slow
Before the picture like an uninked sheet.

HEROD. Bold, e'en for him: but 'twas a wine-caprice.

JOAB. I cried— " What's that you're doing? Why, you've not
So much as read the letter! " He replied:—
" My will's to speak with Herod! That's the meaning!
He is arraigned by me on capital charge! "
Then I was bade relate how the High Priest
Came by his death, and as I told the tale—
A dizziness had gripped him in his bath—
He cut me short and quick— " Gripped! Ay, that is
The fitting word. That dizziness had fists! "
Then I perceived—pardon if I declare it,—
Rome's not persuaded that the youth is drowned;
Nay, but there's accusation in the wind
That by your chamberlain's kind offices
You've had him strangled in the river-depths.

HEROD. Thanks, Alexandra, thanks!

JOAB. Then, waving hand,
He bade me thence—I went. But, once again,
He called to me and spoke— " You've not yet paid
The question I first put you its due answer;
Then hear it twice. This picture, does it favour
The Dead? " As I assented with forced nod,
" And favours Mariamne then her brother?

Say, favours she the youth so piteous—dead?
Is she so fair that every woman hates her?"

HEROD. And you?

JOAB. Hear first what all the others said
Who meanwhile rose, and, gathered at my side,
Circled the picture. With a laugh they said,
Changing with Antony the double glance,
"Say yes! If e'er you took the dead man's largess,
Hap or mishap, you'll see his death avenged."
But I replied I knew no jot of it,
For never else but draped in veils had I
Beheld the Queen: and that's the very truth.

HEROD (*aside*). Ha, Mariamne! But—I laugh at that,
I'll know the trick to shield me from that danger,
This way or that, whatever way it come.
(*To* JOAB.) And what commission did you take for me?

JOAB. No smallest. If commission I had taken
I'd not have roundabouted thus. As 'tis
It seemed imperative.

HEROD. Good: you return
At once to Alexandria with me.
You leave the palace under penalty.

JOAB. Your servant! I'll hold talk with none i' the palace.

HEROD. That's credible! Who hankers for the cross
Now of all times when figs begin to ripe?
My Mute must have the axe, and should he question
The why, he's answered— "Just that you can question."
(*Aside.*) So now I see through whom the Ancient Serpent
So often learned what I—A wicked wench!
(*To* JOAB.) See to't! When done I must behold the head.
I'll send a present to my mother-in-law.
(*Aside.*) She needs a little warning-sign, it seems.

JOAB. At once!

HEROD. This too: the Galilean lad—

Take him beneath your wing—Zerubabel's son.
I'll have a word with him too ere we go.[1]

[*Exit* JOAB.

SCENE 2

HEROD *alone.*

HEROD. Now to't, " and once again! " I'd almost said,
But there's no end in prospect. I resemble
The Man i' the Fable whom before, the lion,
Behind, the tiger gripped at; whom the eagles
With beak and claw were threatening imminent,
And who was standing on a snaky clump.
All's one! I'll make defence as best I can,
And fit each enemy with his own weapon.
Be this henceforth my law and ordinance.
What length it takes, it shall not fret my peace.
If but to the end I keep firm-planted feet
And nothing lose of what I've called my own,
Then let that end be on me when it will.

SCENE 3

HEROD. MARIAMNE.

[*Enter a* SERVANT.

SERVANT. The Queen!

[MARIAMNE *follows close on him.*

HEROD. You've just outstripped my own desire!
I wanted——

MAR. Nay then, surely not to fetch
My thanks in person for the pearls so wondrous?
I waved you twice aside, but once again
Make trial if I'd pleased to change my mood,
That would have strained the patience of a man,
And, past all doubt, the patience of a King.
Nay, nay, I know my duty, and since you,
After my gay-heart brother's swift-sent death,
Shower daily so rich gifts as though you courted
My love anew, I come at last myself

[1] *See* note 2, p. 179.

And show you I have gratitude in heart.
HEROD. I see it!
MAR. Faith, I cannot tell what trend
Your bearing takes. You send for me the diver
Deep, deep into the lightless sea, and if
No one's to find who for the gleaming guerdon
Will dare disturb Leviathan's repose,
You fling your dungeons open and give back
Some robber-varlet his devoted head
To get you a pearl-fisherman for me.
HEROD. That seems a maddish whim? Why, madder still,
I've had a murderer cut down from the cross
When need to snatch a child from out the brand
Was urgent, and I've said to him:—" If you
Return it to the mother, in my eyes
That counterbalances your debt to death."
Ay, he was in with a plunge——
MAR. And back again
Unscathed?
HEROD. It was too late, or otherwise
My word kept, he'd have been dispatched to Rome
A-soldiering. They call for tigers there!
My policy is " Usury with all! "
And why not drive the trade with forfeit lives?
You have your junctures when they offer use.
MAR. (*aside*). Oh that he did not have the bloody hand!
What use are words? For whatsoe'er his deed,
Once on his tongue, he paints it wisely done.
And oh, revolting if he drove me, drove me
To judge a brother-murder, like the rest,
Compelled, inevitable, wisely done!
HEROD. You're silent?
MAR. Shall I speak? Well then of pearls, [1]
You know we only spoke of pearls till now,
Of pearls that are so chaste and blanched as foam
That even against a bloody hand they lose
No clearness in their sparkle! And you heap
Them high on me!

[1] *See* note 3, p. 179.

HEROD. To vexing you?
MAR. Not me!
'Tis sure your gift can never veil intent
Some debt to cancel, and methinks I have
As queen and woman uncontested right
To pearls and precious jewels: I can speak
About the noble stone like Cleopatra:—
" It is my slave to whom I grant my pardon
For standing such ill vicar to the star,
Since, for amends, it overblooms the flower."
And yet you have Salome for a sister.
HEROD. And she?
MAR. Come! If you'd have her murder me
On with your work, and make the deep your plunder,
Else—give the diver his meet rest. I stand
Deep enough in her debt by now. You eye
Me doubtful-scrutinous? Pah! When last year
I lay nigh-dead, she touched me with her kiss;
It was her very first and very last.
I thought at once—" This is your dear reward
For getting gone from the world! " and, faith, it was.
Ah, but I tricked her loving hope, and rallied.
And now I have her kiss for naught, and that
She can't forget. I've mortal fear she might
Store it in mind were I to visit her
With wonder-pearls upon my neck that show
Your latest token of your deepest love.
HEROD (*aside*). There's nothing lacking but that my left hand
Turn traitor to my right!
MAR. I would at least
Disdainfully reject the greeting-cup.
And should she proffer 'stead of spicy wine
E'en innocent water in the crystal bowl,
I'd let that water lie without a touch.
True, that were bare of meaning. No, 'twould be
A natural thing enough; for water is
No more to me what once I felt it was,
Mild element that gives the flowers to drink,

Mother of life to all the world and me.
It thrills with shudders, brims me o'er with horror
Since its jaws oped to gulf my brother down.
Ever I think—" there's life dwells in the drop,
But in the billow dwells the bitter death! "
To you it must be quite another.

HEROD. Why?

MAR. Since through a stream you suffer calumny.
Its own, its dastard, its malicious deed
It dares unload on you! But fear it not,
I'll give't the lie!

HEROD. In very truth?

MAR. I can!
To love the sister and the brother murder!
What reason yokes that pair?

HEROD. Yet if, perhaps,
Himself this brother points his thoughts at murder,
And if alone by breasting his advance,
Nay, by outstripping, one could save his skin!
(We speak here of the possible) and further,
If, harmless in himself, he make a weapon
In hands of foeman malleable, a weapon
Whose bite must bring sure death unless its mark
Shatter it well before it can be hurled
(We speak here of the possible), and last
If this same weapon threatened no sole head,
Nay, but a whole Folk's grand collective head
And one for such a Folk imperative
As is for any other trunk its head
(We speak here of the possible), and yet
In such a chain of chance I think the Sister,
As wife from love she duly owes her husband,
As daughter of her folk from holy bond,
As Queen, from both, would have no choice but say:—
" What happened was the thing I dare not blame."
[*He clasps* MARIAMNE's *hand.*
And if a Ruth be slow to catch my drift
(How could she learn it at the gleaning hour?)
The Maccabean daughter understands!
In Jericho you could not give your kisses,

You will be able in Jerusalem! [*He kisses her.*
And if perchance the kiss bring after-grudging
Then hear a reconcilement for us twain:—
I took it for a token of farewell
And that farewell may be farewell eternal!

MAR. Eternal!

HEROD. Yes! Antony's had me summoned
But still I know not whether I return.

MAR. You know not?

HEROD. Since I know not how severe
An accusation my—your mother's lodged.
[MARIAMNE *makes to speak.*
That's naught. I'll bear it. But one thing alone
I must learn from your lips. I say I must learn—
Whether and how I undertake defence.

MAR. Whether——

HEROD. O Mariamne, question not!
You know the spell that knits me into you,
You know that every day makes it more potent.
Ah, but your heart must feel I have no strength
To battle my own cause if you refuse
Assurance that your heart-beats twin my own.
Oh tell me, is that heart fiery or cold?
And then I can tell you if Antony
Will call me brother or condemn me straight
To hunger-death in the earth-embowelled dungeon
Whose blackness prisoned up Jugurtha's death.
You're dumb? Oh be not dumb! How keen I feel
That such confession scarce beseems a king;
'Tis not his part to yoke his neck beneath
The common lot of man, 'tis not his part
To bind his inmost on another's life,
He should be knit unto his God alone.
I am not fashioned thus; when you last year
Were sick to death, then I was busy too
About self-slaughter that I might not live
To see your death; and now that you know this
Know yet another thing. If I should chance,
Yes I, to be a-dying, I could do
What you dread at Salome's hands, I could

A poison mix and give it you in wine,
That even in death I might be sure of you.

MAR. And were you to do that you would recover!

HEROD. No, no! I would have shared the half with you!
Now speak your heart. Were pardon in your grace
For such o'erbrimming measure of love as this?

MAR. If after quaffing such a drink I had
Surviving breath to utter one last word,
I'd call a curse on you with that last word.
(*Aside.*) Yea, all the sooner were it done the surer
That I myself, if death should call you hence,
Could in my pain stretch hands to grasp my dagger.
That deed the heart can do, but suffer never!

HEROD. In yester-evening's fire there was a woman
Consumed with her dead husband: 'gainst essay
At rescue made she brindled up: this woman
Of course meets your contempt?

MAR. Who tells you that?
She scorned at least to be an altar victim
And sacrificed herself, a deed that proves
She prized her dead love more than all the world.

HEROD. And you, and I?

MAR. If you dare tell yourself
You've put me in the scales against the world,
What could be left to keep me in the world?

HEROD. The world! The world has many a sovereign still,
And none among them but were fain to share
His throne with you, not one who for your sake
Would not abandon bride and oust his wife
The very morn after his wedding-night.

MAR. Is Cleopatra dead that you speak thus?

HEROD. You are so fair that all who gaze upon you
Nigh win a faith in immortality,
That unctuous, flattering Pharisaic hope,
Since none can realise your image e'er
Should fade in him; so fair, that it would seem
No wonder to me if with sudden travail
The mountains yielded me some nobler metal
Than gold and silver for your ornamenting,

Some metal long enwombed against your coming;
So fair that—ha! the knowledge that you die
Hard on another's death, from loving die
That close upon his fore-flight you may hasten
And in a sphere to hold you where one is
And is no more (I picture such a heaven
As latest breath with latest breath immingled),
Ah, that were worth the self-dealt death, 'twould be
Beyond the grave, that home where horror dwells,
To find still one more rapture. Mariamne,
Dare I hope such a thing, or must fear take me
That you would—Antony has asked of you!

MAR. Men do not issue notes of hand for acts,
Much less for smartings and for sacrifice,
Such as Despair can bring, I feel full well,
Though love can never make demand on them.[1]

HEROD. Farewell!

MAR. Farewell! I know you will come back.
Your slayer's— He alone (*pointing to heaven*)——

HEROD. So small the fear?

MAR. So great the confidence!

HEROD. Love is a-tremble,
A-tremble even in a hero's breast.

MAR. But my love trembles not!

HEROD. You tremble not?

MAR. Now I begin. Can you no more trust self
Since you—the brother of me—then woe to me
And woe to you!

HEROD. You hold that word in check,
That simple word, when I had hoped of you
An oath! What base is left whereon to build?

MAR. And if I gave that oath, what surety yours
I'd keep it? Always I and only I,
My Being as you know it. Thus I think
Since you must end, it seems, with hope and faith
You make beginning where you end—with both!
Go, go! I can no other! Not now, not yet!

[*Exit.*

[1] *See* note 4, p. 179.

Scene 4

Herod *alone.*

Herod. Not now! The next day then, the next day's morrow!
After my death she will be kind to me!
What, speaks a woman thus? I know that oft
When I have called her fair she's marred her features
With twistings till she was no longer fair.
I know she cannot weep, that her drawn face
Tells what in others finds the vent of tears.
I know that she had quarrelled with her brother
Not long before he found death in his bath,
And then play-acted the disconsolate,
And, to cap that, when he was now a corpse,
Displayed another gift received from him
And bought for her while he went to his bath!
Yet speaks a woman thus in the very moment
When he, the man she loves or at the least
Is bound to love—She turned not round again
As once when I—She left no kerchief back
That she for pretext—No, she can endure it
That I with this impression—Good! So be it!
To Alexandria—the grave—all's one!
But one thing first! One! Earth and Heaven hear it!
You swore me naught, I'll swear a thing to you!
I'll put you under sword! And Antony,
Should he command my fall on your account,
E'en though he wrought it not to save your mother
Shall be my dupe. How doubtful e'er it be
Whether the robe that shrouds me at my death
Follows me to my grave because some thief
Can still purloin it, you shall follow me!
That's firm and fixed! Should I return no more
You die! A stumpy point that trips the foot!
What gives assurance I shall be obeyed
When I'm no longer dreaded? Ha, I think
There's one to find who at her frown has cause
For shivering!

Scene 5

HEROD. JOSEPH.

[*Enter a* SERVANT.

SERVANT. Your kinsman!

HEROD. He is welcome!
There is my man! To him I hand my sword
And goad him through the craven mood so deep
To hardy mettle that he'll use't like me.

[*Enter* JOSEPH.

JOSEPH. I heard immediate start for Alexandria
Is your intent, and wished to bid God-speed.

HEROD. God-speed! A speed, belike, without returning.

JOSEPH. Without returning!

HEROD. Ay, 'tis possible.

JOSEPH. I never saw you thus till now.

HEROD. Proof certain
I never was in such ill plight till now.

JOSEPH. But if you grow heart-faint——

HEROD. I'll not, I say!
For, come what will, I'll bear it: yet the hope
That any good can come leaves me in lurch.

JOSEPH. That makes me wish to God I had been blind
And ne'er on Alexandra's hooded doings
Had played the pry.

HEROD. I could believe it of you!

JOSEPH. For had I not unearthed the portraiture
Of Aristobulus which in secrecy
For Antony was painted, and had I
Not scented out her courier-despatch
To Cleopatra: more than all, the coffin
That with her son concealed her at the harbour—
Had I not blocked it and prevented flight
That was begun already——

HEROD. Then had she
No thanks to owe you, and with qualmless mind
You'd bear to see her daughter on the throne,
The throne that she, the dauntless Maccabean,
Will surely mount if I return no more,
And none before her edge his way thereto.

JOSEPH. I mean it not that way; I mean that much
Had lain in smother.
HEROD. Much! Why, not a doubt
But much that's awkward had instead occurred.
No matter now. You make your tally full;
But there's one item you've forgot——
JOSEPH. And that?
HEROD. You were presumably attending him
The time he went a-bathing when——
JOSEPH. I was.
HEROD. Presumably you wrestled him?
JOSEPH. At first, yes.
HEROD. H'm, queerish! Well?
JOSEPH. No dizziness attacked him
When he was in my arms, and had it happened
Either I would have rescued him or he
Had dragged me under with him to the bottom.
HEROD. No doubt. But as you cannot help but know,
All who were there make just your protestation,
And since a perverse chance will have it so,
That you not only bore him company
But wrestled him——
JOSEPH. What means that check of word?
HEROD. My Joseph, you and I, we make a couple
That stands stern charge.
JOSEPH. I too?
HEROD. I dare assert
I have both kin and trusty friend in you?
JOSEPH. 'Tis so I flatter me.
HEROD. 'Twere better not so.
Had I like Saul cast the dart after you
And could you prove it through your deathly wound
For you 'twere better: no back-biter's word
Had risen to find the credulous ear: and you,
For a blood-deed of which your hands were guiltless,
Would never lose your head.
JOSEPH. I? lose my head?
HEROD. That is your fate if I do not return,
And Mariamne——
JOSEPH. But my hands *are* guiltless:

HEROD. What helps you there? the ugly look's against you.
And then again, suppose you were believed,
Are not the many, many services
You've rendered me, in Alexandra's eyes
As many crimes against herself? Will she
Not have these thoughts— " Had he o'erwinked my flight
There'd be one living who now lies i' the grave? "
JOSEPH. True, true!
HEROD. And can she not then with some show
Of right demand your life to pay another's
That she imagines lost through fault of yours?
Will she not set her daughter on to do it?
JOSEPH. Salome! Ah, that comes of visiting
The painter. Year on year fresh portraits of me
She still demands.
HEROD. I know she loves you dear.
JOSEPH. The less her love, the better were my case.
Had I the portrait of Aristobulus
Detected when I—good then. She can soon
Possess my latest, less a head.
HEROD. My Joseph,
A man protects his head.
JOSEPH. When you have given
Your own for lost?
HEROD. That's only half the trick.
I'll try to save it through the stratagem,
That of myself free-willed I thrust that head
Into the lion's gullet.
JOSEPH. Once luck helped you
When the Pharisees——
HEROD. This is a sorrier case.
But hap what haps to me it is my will
To lay your destiny in your own hands.
You always were a man, be now a king.
I hang the purple mantle round your neck
And proffer you the sceptre and the sword.
Hold fast. To me alone you give it back!

JOSEPH. What, do I understand you?
HEROD. And confirm
Your throne and life with it in certain tenure
By killing Mariamne if your hear
That I return not hither.
JOSEPH. Mariamne?
HEROD. She is the last bond whereby Alexandra
Is knit unto the folk now that the flood
Has choked her son; she is the gay-hued plume
Rebellion's helm will flaunt, the day whereon
It heads against you.
JOSEPH. Ah, but Mariamne!
HEROD. Amazed that I——? I'll make no false front,
Joseph!
My counsel's good, is good for you; what need
Of further words? yet, to be frank, I give it
Not for your sake alone—Here's the bluff truth!
That she should with some other—I can't bear it—
That would be bitterer than—I grant she's proud—
But after death—and then, Antony—
And first and worst of all that mother of hers
Who'll harry on the dead against the dead—
You catch my drift, you must.
JOSEPH. But——
HEROD. Hear me out!
She led me on to hope that she herself
Would deal her death if I—— Tell me, can debts
Be summoned in by proxy? 'Tis allowed
Even by force—what think you?
JOSEPH. 'Tis allowed.
HEROD. Promise me then that you will take her life
If she take not her own. Be not too hasty
And not too tardy either. Go to her
Soon as my messenger, for I shall send one,
Reports of me " it's over! " tell it her
And mark then if she reaches hand for dirk
Or makes to do aught else. You promise?
JOSEPH. Yes.
HEROD. I will not have you swear, for no man yet
Forced any one to swear he'd use his foot

To crush a snake that threatened him with death.
He does it of himself if he be sane;
For he could sooner practise abstinence
Of meat and drink without a scathe, than this.
[JOSEPH *makes a gesture.*
I know you throughly and I will commend you
To Antony as one in all this crew
That he dare trust in. You will prove him that
By showing that a woman of your blood
Is not too sacred to become your victim
When smothering of rebellion is the stake,
For that's the point of view will gloze the deed,
That side you serve up for his eyes. 'Tis followed
By a street hubbub: your despatch to him
Is that an outbreak was your deed's precursor
And only by its instrument was quelled.
As for the folk, 'twill have a shuddering-fit
When it beholds your bloody sword, and many
Will say:—" It seems I knew but half this man! "
And now——

JOSEPH. I'll see you yet, not now alone;
I know for sure, as ever you'll come back.

HEROD. 'Tis not past hope: and therefore one thing more— [*A long pause.*
I swore just now an oath that touches you.
[*Writes a letter and seals it.*
Here 'tis! Receive in charge this letter sealed.
You see the run o' the title—

JOSEPH. To the headsman!

HEROD. I'll keep what I have therein promised you,
And if, perhaps, you've mind to tell a tale
About a King who——

JOSEPH. Come! Impose the task,
To hand this note myself unto the headsman.[1]
[*Exit.*

[1] *See* note 5, p. 180.

Scene 6

Herod *alone.*

Herod. Now she lives under sword, and that's my spur
To do what I ne'er did before, to suffer
What ne'er before I suffered, and find comfort
If all be vain! and now, away!

[*Exit.*

ACT II

Scene I

The Castle on Zion. Alexandra's *Apartments.*
Alexandra. Sameas.

Alexandra. You know it now.
Sameas. It gives me no surprise.
No, in a Herod nothing gives surprise
Who once as stripling on the Sanhedrim
Declared a war: who with his gleaming weapon
Strode up before his judge and dropped the hint
That he himself was Headsman and the Headsman
Upon himself no sentence executes,
He may as man—Ha, I can see him now
As, front to front opposing the High Priest,
He leaned against a column 'mid a ring
Of his hired bravos, who in robber-hunting
Turned robber too—strange metamorphosis!
And took our total tally, head for head,
As though he stood before a thistle patch
And summed in mind a way to weed it clean.
Alex. Yes, yes, that was an hour of hours for him,
A moment he may proudly call to mind.
A boyish madcap, scarce in his twentieth year,
He stands arraigned before the Sanhedrim,
Because in stark presumptuous sacrilege
He'd arrogated violence on the law;
Because his hand unsanctioned executed
A death-decree you had not yet pronounced.
The dead man's widow, as he treads the threshold,
Counters him with her curse: within there sits
All in Jerusalem that's old and grey.
But since he comes not sackclothed, and no ashes
Bestrew his head, you get a sag in the heart:
You think no more with punishment to greet him,

You think no more with threatenings to tame him!
You say him naught, he laughs you off and goes.
SAMEAS. I spoke!
ALEX. Yes, when too late!
SAMEAS. And had I done it
Before that moment it had been soo soon.
Through reverence for the High Priest I was silent.
He was the eldest and the youngest I.
ALEX. No matter. Had you courage at that moment
To prove you held the simple heart of duty
The larger mood would not be urgent now.
Then look to't well if you—Ho, ho! I see
Another loophole yet remains if you
Scarce relish combat with him, and in truth
'Twere risky play. Best 'ware him. So you'll enter
For a mild bout with lions and with tigers
In this brute-battle that he now ordains.
SAMEAS. What mean these words?
ALEX. You know the fighting-games
Of Rome? What, no?
SAMEAS. Thank God I know them not.
I count it for no jot of gain to know
About the heathen but what Moses tells us.
Down go my eyelids every single time
I see a Roman soldier cross my path,
And then I bless my father in his grave
That he ne'er gave me tutoring in their tongue.
ALEX. And so you do not know that savage beasts
Are shipped by them from Africa to Rome
In hundreds?
SAMEAS. No indeed, I know it not.
ALEX. Not know that there in a stone-built arena
They drive them at each other, and that slaves
Are hounded on them, who for life or death
Must face them in the fight, and they the while
Circled around upon high benches sit
All jubilant when wounds of death are gaping
And when the red blood spurts on sprinkled sand?
SAMEAS. Such things the wildest fancy of my dreaming

Ne'er showed me; but it joys my very soul
If such they do. It fits the breed o' them!
(*With raised hands.*) Lord, Thou art great; and though Thy will vouchsafe
The heathen life, he must requite the gift
By payment to Thee of a gruesome tribute.
Thou dost chastise him as he uses others.
Such games I could well see!

ALEX. Your wish will find
Fruition soon as Herod comes again.
He plans to introduce them.

SAMEAS. Never, never!

ALEX. That's what I said to you. Why not? We have
Lions enough for sure. The mountain herd
Will be rejoiced to see their tale diminished
By saving many kine and many calves.[1]

SAMEAS. To raise no other point, where would he find
The fighters? In our folk there are no slaves
Bound to his beck and call for life or death.

ALEX. The first I see before me.

SAMEAS. What?

ALEX. For sure!
You will, as now, twist up your angry face,
Forget yourself, perhaps, and clench the fists,
Set eyes at rolling and the teeth at gnashing
If spared to witness that high day on which,
August, as Solomon of yore the Temple,
He consecrates the heathenish arena.
This will not slip his eyes, and for reward
He passes you a signal that you enter
And show to the assembled folk your powers
When you stand face to face against a lion
Who'd been whole days before made sharp with hunger.
But since among our folk there's lack of slaves,
The death-devoted criminals must needs
Supply their place; and who's more death-devoted
Than he who openly defies the King?

[1] *See* note 6, p. 180.

SAMEAS. He may——
ALEX. Dispel your doubts! It would go ill
If he should lose his head before his time.
There would be projects nipped along with him
That Pompey, who with brazen heathendom
Dared the approach unto the Holy of Holies,
Himself might——
SAMEAS (*breaking out*). Antony, if thou'lt but grip him;
A whole year's space I vow I will not curse thee!
And if thou dost it not—then good, we're ready!
ALEX. He says that if our folk were not ordained
To mix with others, then had we this earth-ball
From God received for our sole dwelling-portion.
SAMEAS. He says so?
ALEX. But since Fate has other will
There rises need the dam-walls to unbarrier
Which long have shut us, like a stagnant mere
Locked from the sea, away from other peoples,
And there's no other method but that we
In use and custom mould us to their fashion.
SAMEAS. In use and—(*to Heaven*) Lord, if I break not in raving
Send me Thy sign how such a churl shall die,
Sign of some death which every other death
Sucks of its horrors, and proclaim to me
That it is Herod for whose sake 'tis done.
ALEX. Be you then the Death-Angel?
SAMEAS. Or for him
Or for myself! I swear't! Can I not hinder
This ghastly plan, my impotence I'll punish
With murder of myself (*with a gesture towards his breast*) ere that day comes,
The day that he shall first befleck with mire.
There is a binding oath that a misdeed
Will wring from me if for a hero-deed
I prove unfit. Who ever swore a greater?
ALEX. Good! But forget not this; if your own arm
Be over-weak to dash your foemen downwards,
A stranger's arm must not then be contemned.
SAMEAS. And such a stranger?

ALEX. You may arm with ease.
SAMEAS. Speak plainer language!
ALEX. Who created Herod
A King?
SAMEAS. Why, Antony; who otherwise?
ALEX. And wherefore did it?
SAMEAS. While it pleased him so;
Perhaps, too, just because it pleased not us.
When had a heathen ever better grounds?
ALEX. And, further, what maintains him on the throne?
SAMEAS. Not the folk's blessing! Maybe 'tis its curse.
Who can say that?
ALEX. I! Nothing but his trick
Of sending every year ere reckoning-day
The tax that we are forced to pay the Romans,
Ay, and the same of his own will to double
If some new war has broken into blaze.
The Roman wants our gold and nothing more,
He leaves to us our Faith, he leaves our God,
Would even help to do Him reverence,
And, niched with Jupiter and Ops and Isis,
Grant Him a corner in the Capitol
That has been let lie vacant till to-day
If only He, as they, were made of stone.
SAMEAS. If it be so, alas! and it is so,
What have you then to hope of Antony?
In this regard, yourself has said it, Herod
Yields each punctilious tittle. Why, I've seen
The tribute-panniers carried. One mule broke
His backbone ere it reached the city-gate.
For every drop of blood within his veins
He renders up to him an ounce of gold.[1]
Think you on your account he'll send it back?
ALEX. 'Twere bootless, if I steered my cause myself,
But Cleopatra does the deed for me,
And, so I hope, will Mariamne too.
Amazed? Fail not my meaning. Not in person;
In such a case she'd rather turn on me.
But through her picture, and not even through that,

[1] *See* note 7, p. 180.

No, through another close resembling her.
For as a wild wood harbours not alone
The lion, but his foe as well, the tiger,
So in the hot-bed of this Roman's heart
Ennests itself a wormy brood of passions
Wrestling each other for the dominant place.
And thus, if Herod builds upon the first
I build upon the second, and I think
That mine's a lustier wrestler than its fellow.

SAMEAS. You are——

ALEX. No Hyrcan, tho' I be his daughter.
But, lest you should misprise what I have done,
I am not Mariamne either. If,
To pave his way towards her, Antony
Destroys the man that has her in possession,
She still is mistress of herself and can
Enwrap her in eternal widow-weeds.
But this I hold for certain, that by now
He's laid his hand on sword and if not yet
He's drawn it, one sole point of pause detains him
That this luck-minion among soldiers, Herod,
Stands good to Romans for the iron ring
That all things here with us together clamps.
But once you furnish him with opposite proof,
Rouse insurrection, stir the flaccid peace,
And he will draw't.

SAMEAS. I'll furnish easy proof!
The folk's already struck him dead in thought,
They rumour that——

ALEX. Impress your seal thereon!
Then swiftly open his last testament;
You know the contents now, the fighting-games
Stand at the head, and then when every man
Believes him shortened of a hundred stripes
Through Herod's death, or of the torture-cross,
Then each believes what he can dare believe.
For there are things that loom o'er Israel
Will wring from many a heart in its despair
The wish of agony that the Red Sea
Had gulfed the whole folk deep into its maw

And the twelve holy Tribes and Moses first.

SAMEAS. I go, and ere the midday comes——

ALEX. I know
What you can work if you but take the sack-cloth
And thread the lanes with wailing-cry of "woe!"
As were your forebear Jonah here again.
And you will find there's service in the knack
Of paying a chance visit to the Fisher
And sharing Goodman Gaffer's bite and sup
From what he grants himself since no one buys it.

SAMEAS. And you will find that all we Pharisees
Have not forgot the stigma that we suffered,
As you would seem to reckon. Hear then now
What only through the deed was meant to reach you—
We have been sworn against him long ere now,
We've dug our burrows under all Judaea,
And in Jerusalem, that you may see
How sure the count we have upon the folk,
There's even a blind adherent to our band!

ALEX. What boots he?

SAMEAS. Naught. He knows as much himself,
But he's so crammed with hate, so grim with grudge,
That he'll be joined with us in our emprise
And rather perish if it should miscarry
Than drag his life in such a world as this.
I have a notion that's a promising sign! [*Exit.*

SCENE 2

ALEXANDRA *alone.*

ALEX. The folk's already struck him dead in thought!
I know, I know! and by that token see
How sore the wish that he no more returns.
A lucky juncture that the locust-swarm
Settled on him as he went forth! It stands
For omen that it is no futile wish.
It may be, too, by now an actual thing

That, less his head—Not that! Speak as you think!
No eavesdrop Pharisee's before the door.
An Antony is sure an Antony,
Ay, but a Roman, and a Roman gives
His verdict slow as the fulfilment's swift.
Prisoner he may be though he sit not yet
Within the dungeon: and a coaxing deft
Can lead it further. Therefore it is good
If now rebellion come, albeit I know
What in itself's its import, and not less
What aftermath it trammels up if he
Return in Fate's despite. If! It can happen!
Think well upon't! He sent you as he left
A severed head for a farewell-reminder.
That shows you—Pah! I speak just like my father!
It shows me that he's swift to the deed, as tyrants
Are wont; and further that he's fain to fright me.
The one I long have known, the other shall
Slip his intent; and if the worst should come,
If all o'erleap its target and if he,
Spite his infatuate love for Mariamne
Which sooner mounts than falls and which protects me,
Should dare his fellest once her will is won—
What of it? On revenge is all my stake
And that revenge would follow me in death,
Revenge on him who did it and on her
Who let it happen. Never would the folk
And never Rome look on indulgent-slack,
And then, what touches me myself, I would
In an event so bloody all the better
Be mated with my forebears. They were forced,
The greater number of my stem, th' Eld-Mothers
As the Eld-Fathers, to forsake the world
Short of a head because they would not bend it.
I would but share their fate; what were it more?

Scene 3

ALEXANDRA. MARIAMNE.

ALEXANDRA (*aside*). She comes! Ah, could she be decoyed from him
And yield consent to follow me to Rome,
Then—but she hates and loves him at a breath!
Dare I arouse a last storm? To the deed!
[*Hastening towards* MARIAMNE.
You seek for comfort where it may be found!
Come to my heart!
MAR. Comfort?
ALEX. You need it not?
Then I have known you ill! Yet I had grounds
To judge you for the woman you are not.
You have been slandered to me!
MAR. I? to you?
ALEX. I have been told of arms enlinked and kisses
Bestowed upon a brother-murdering consort
Hot on the deed by—Pardon! I had no right
To give it credence.
MAR. None?
ALEX. No! ever No!
And No, on more than one ground. Could you even
Begrudge the bloody shadow of your brother,
All heartless, the atonement of revenge
Sisters should sacrifice, revenge that not
Through Judith's sword and not through Rahab's[1] nail,
No, merely through a notion of the mouth
And merely through still folding of the arms
Were better wreaked and to the Dead devoted,
Then he, the very murderer, had not dared
To come anear you, for you're like the Dead One:
And you could hurt his sight as 'twere the corse
Of Aristobulus tricked in woman's paint;
He would have turned him from you shuddering.
MAR. He did not do the one, nor I the other.

[1] A mistake of Hebbel's for Jael.

ALEX. Then be——But no, perchance a doubt still lingers
Touching his guilt. Will you then have the proof?
MAR. I need it not.
ALEX. You need——
MAR. 'Twere bootless to me.
ALEX. Then—but I hold the curse even now in check,
I see another one has lighted on you!
You still walk in the fetters of a love
That never shed a lustre——
MAR. Yet I thought
I had not picked a consort for myself,
I had but yoked my neck beneath the doom
That you and Hyrcan with a pious care
Had hung above a daughter and a grandchild.
ALEX. Not I! My coward father sealed the bond.
MAR. And by that deed he pleased you ill?
ALEX. Not that!
Or else I had outstripped him with our flight.
I had a refuge open down in Egypt.
I only say the thing was clinched by him,
By him, the first High Priest without a spine!
And I but battled down the first repugnance
With which I took his meaning. Yet I did it
Because I found the coward's tradesman-traffic
Good in the main, and gave for Edom's sword
The Pearl of Zion, when he pressed me hard.
Yea, had the serpent had a poisoned fang
When it was dug that time in Cleopatra,
Or had a lucky chance brought Antony
Toward these regions when upon his march,
I had said no! but, as it was, said yes!
MAR. Yet in despite of that——
ALEX. I hoped of you
That you'd not fritter off the bargain-price,
And touching Herod, that you——
MAR. Ah, I know!
It was my part, for every kiss I gave
To haggle in advance for any head
That had mispleased you, and at last when none
Was left to cross you but his own, to spur him

To his self-slaughter; or if that should fail,
To couch and spy a chance in the still night
And subtly second Judith's catlike deed.
Then would you have been proud to call me child!

ALEX. Prouder than now, I give it no denial.

MAR. I chose to be a wife unto the husband
To whom your hands had led me, and for him
Forget the Maccabean to the measure
In which he should forget the King for me.

ALEX. And yet it seems in Jericho that she
Caused you a second thought: at all events
You were the first to break in lamentation
When I myself still held my wailings back
To prove you. Was't not so?

MAR. In Jericho
The hideous hap had dizzied all my mind.
It came too swift—From board to bath, from bath
To grave—a brother! Whirlwinds swept my brain!
But if against my sovereign and my husband
I barred the door, slant-thoughted and stone-hearted,
I rue it now, and only can condone it
Because 'twas done as though in fever's heat.

ALEX. In fever's heat?

MAR. (*in a semi-aside*). I'd not have done it either
Were he not come to me in mourning-garments!
In red, dark red, I could have borne to see him,
But——

ALEX. Ha! He found them quick! Before the deed
He had them ordered, just as other murderers,
Where possible, draw water ere they murder—

MAR. Mother, forget not!

ALEX. What? That you are wife
Unto the murderer? You're but late become
This creature; only while you will you are so;
Yea, and you are so maybe now no more.
But you have ever been the Dead One's sister
And will remain so—yea, you will remain so
Even when you call—thither, it seems, you tend—
Into his grave—"You had but justice done you!"

MAR. I owe you debt of reverence, and I shrink
From violence on it; therefore hold your peace.
Or else I could——
ALEX. What could you?
MAR. Ask myself
On whom this deed lays guilty onus—him
That took it through because he must, or her
Who wrung it from him! Let the Dead One rest!
ALEX. Speak thus to one who did not give him birth!
I bore him underneath my heart, and must
Avenge him since I cannot waken him
To wreak his own revenge.
MAR. Avenge him then,
Avenge him on yourself! You know right well
It was the High Priest whom the shouting folk
Ringed on his giddy pinnacle with joyance
And that 'twas not the youngling Aristobulus
Who brought upon himself the Thing that happened.
Who was it drove the youngling, tell me that!
Out of his old unthinking self-content?
Surely he lacked not coats of many colours
Wherewith to charm the eyes of pretty maids,
And more he needed not for happiness.
What should he do with Aaron's priestly mantle
You still must hang about him to his surfeit?
And of himself he had no other thought
Than " Does it suit me well? " But others deemed him
Straight from the very moment it was donned
The second Head of Israel; and you
Had swift success himself so to befool
That his puffed mind must think him first and sole.
ALEX. 'Tis blasphemy 'gainst him and me!
MAR. 'Tis none!
For if this youngling, who it seemed had birth
To show the world her first-born happy man,
If he so swift, so dark an end has found,
And if the man who, when his sword's once drawn
Shames every other man into a woman,
If he—I know not if 'twas he, but fear it,—

Then, true, ambition, lust for power are cause,
But not ambition that the Dead One hugged
And not the lust for power that plagues the King.
I'll not accuse you—'twould beseem me ill—
But, to requite your sending of a ghost,
A bloody ghost, into our marriage-chamber,
I will not see you shed the tear of rue
Though now we twain no more are side by side
And, for the Third, it wilders so my sense
That I am dumb when it were well to speak
And speak when it were better to be dumb.
Nay, nay, I will not quench your vengeful thirst
Nor ask what you avenge—your plans or son.
Do what you will! go further, check your foot—
Only, be well assured of this—the barb
That reaches Herod reaches Mariamne!
The oath that I withheld and he demanded
In leaving me, I swear it now! I perish
If he should perish! Act then, speak no more!

ALEX. Then perish! Now! For——

MAR. Yes, I understand!
And this was why you thought I needed comfort?
Oh no! You err. It frights me not
That the men-slugs o' the world, who only suffer
The Elect because they owe man's debt to death,
Have with their mouths already struck him dead.
What has the slave for solace when the King
In gorgeousness and glory sweeps him by
Than this—to say, "He gets his turn like me!
I grudge it not! And when he mounts his throne
Fresh from a field o'erstrewn with graves in thousands
I'll praise him for't: it chokes his covetous mood!"
Ah, but my Herod lives and he will live!
So says my heart to me. Death flings a shadow
And that falls on me here! (*pointing to her heart*).

SCENE 4

THE SAME. JOSEPH.

[*Enter a* SERVANT.

SERVANT. The Viceroy comes!

ALEX. Weaponed for certain, as he always is
When he comes our way, since he had no luck
In cozening our wits with glozing phrases
After the manner of his first attempt.
Do you not know Salome at the time
Perished for jealousy?

MAR. She does so now:
For with an intimate smile I say to him
Most shameless things whenever she is near,
And since herself she never tires of spying
I never tire of soundly whipping her
For fatuous folly. [*Enter* JOSEPH.

ALEX. (*pointing to* JOSEPH's *weapon*). See you?

MAR. Let him then!
His wife demands it so that she may dream
She has a husband who's a man of war.

ALEX. (*to* JOSEPH). I am still here!

JOSEPH. A very strange reception!

ALEX. My son too is still here. As once before
He's hid him in the dead man's Wooden House.
Harry him out and I will pardon you
Because you did it once before unbidden.
But this time you must hunt your coffin not
Upon a vessel sailing Egypt-bound,
No, you must seek it in the graveyard's belly!

JOSEPH. I'm not the man to wake the dead to life.

ALEX. (*with scorn directed at* MARIAMNE). Ay true! or you had companied your Lord
So that when all his kneeling and his pleading
Were fruitless to frustrate the lictor's axe——

MAR. He kneels and pleads?

JOSEPH (*to* MARIAMNE). I'll let you know his way!
" I am impeached for this crime! I confess it!
But not for this! Well, for your information,
I'll fill the gap up soon! " Yes, that's his way.

ALEX. His cock crows for him?
JOSEPH. He has done't ere now,
As I stood by, the time the Pharisees
Would have arraigned him under Antony.
He filed his own indictment in their stead,
Hurried to camp before them, as he was,
And, when they came, revised and supplemented
The reckoning point for point and said to them—
" Speak, if I've left an item out or not! "
The event you know; a many of the accusers
Were shorn of their thick heads since they'd not budge;
He carried off the Roman's fullest favour.
ALEX. In those days both were younger than they now are.
The one's superb presumption pleased the other,
And all the more because at other's costs,
Not at his own, 'twas flaunted. Can the Roman
Value the Pharisee at aught, whose tongue
Preaches continual mutiny 'gainst Rome?
" Who plucks his beard curtails his standing! " thought
Mark Antony in sport: and yet I doubt
If he'll allow the joke against himself.
JOSEPH. You speak as though you wished——
ALEX. Whether our wishes
Are paired or not, is that affair of yours?
You hold fast to your own! For you it's weighty
That he returns.
JOSEPH. You think so? If for me
For you, then.
ALEX. I have not a notion why
There was in olden days an Alexandra
Whose temples bore a crown in Israel,
Who fell on it when it became free prey
And would not leave it lying for a thief.
By God, we'll have no dearth here of a second
If it is true (*to* MARIAMNE) that there are Maccabeans
Who keep their childish oaths!
JOSEPH (*sounding* ALEXANDRA). 'Tis true indeed!

There was in olden days this Alexandra,
But whosoe'er will reach her goal, he must
Tread her whole journey with no half-way lapse.
Soon as she climbed the throne she reconciled
Herself with all her foes, and not a soul
Had need to fear her, only cause to hope.
No wonder that she sat fast till her death!

MAR. I think that paltry! What end serves a sceptre
If not to gratify our hate and love?
A twig's enough to frighten off the flies.

JOSEPH. Quite true. (*To* ALEXANDRA.) And you?

ALEX. She never saw in dream
Her House's earliest sire, the mighty Judas,
'Tis certain else she had no foeman shunned;
For from his grave he still protects his children
Because he cannot die in any heart.
How could he so? There's never a man can pray
Who must not say— "To him I owe my thanks
That I may yet kneel down before my God
And not to bronze and wood and stone."

JOSEPH (*aside*). The King
Was in the right! The deed I must accomplish,
And that on both, or else endure them both.
I must emplant the crown upon my brow
If I'd ensure it from the headsman's axe.
For here a world of hate stares in against me.
Then good! Their sentence they've pronounced themselves.
For the last time I've put the test on them.
Were but his courier here, this very moment
I'd bring it to a pitiless consummation.
Each several preparation has been made.

SCENE 5

THE SAME. TITUS. *Afterwards*, PHILO.

[*Enter a* SERVANT.

SERVANT. Titus the Captain craves an audience.

JOSEPH (*about to go*). At once!

ALEX. And why not here?
SERVANT. He's here already
[*Enter* TITUS.
TITUS (*in a whispered aside to Joseph*). What you have feared is come about; the folk
Rebels!
JOSEPH. Be quick then, do what I've commanded!
Call out your cohort! Put it into action!
TITUS. Already done! And now I come to ask you
Whether you wish for prisoners or dead.
My eagle grips as thoroughly as he mangles
And you must know which better serves your ends.
JOSEPH. Blood must not flow.
TITUS. Good. Then the hewing starts
Before they get their stoning well begun,
Else I had done it later.
JOSEPH. Saw you Sameas?
TITUS. The Pharisee who once had nearly blundered
His head against my shield because his eyes
He always shuts as soon as e'er he spies me?
I saw him sure enough!
JOSEPH. And how? Speak loud!
TITUS. In the open market-place ringed round by thousands
And cursing Herod loudly.
JOSEPH (*to* ALEXANDRA). Sameas
Took leave of you but one short hour ago.
ALEX. Saw you't?
TITUS (*to* JOSEPH). You show yourself?
JOSEPH. Soon as I can.
Meanwhile——
TITUS. 'Tis good. I go. (*About to go.*)
ALEX. A word yet, Captain!
Say why the guard's recalled from us.
MAR. Is't missing?
ALEX. Missing since yester-evening.
JOSEPH. Since I bade it.
TITUS. And since the King in leaving said to me—
" Before you is the man who knows my will.

What he commands, that I command myself!"
[*Exit.*

ALEX. (*to* JOSEPH). And you?

JOSEPH. I thought that Judas Maccabaeus
Were guard enough for you and for your daughter.
And, for the rest, you hear how matters stand
Without. I need the soldiers. (*Aside.*) If the Romans
Were near as this, I might have little luck.
To-day I stationed Galileans.

ALEX. (*to* MARIAMNE). Think you
That my mistrust is groundless still?

MAR. I know not,
But now its sting infects. I feel 'tis strange!
And yet—If from the wall a javelin darted
It had not tricked my expectation more.

ALEX. Two thrusts, and then the throneward way is free:
For when the Maccabeans are no more
The turn comes round for the Herodians.

MAR. I'd laugh you yet to ridicule if only
His wife were not Salome. By my brother
Her head is mine! For I shall say to Herod,
"As you avenge me on her so you love me!"
For she—'tis she! never that fellow there!

ALEX. Too early triumph! Our first call is action
And I've a notion we can use this outbreak.

MAR. This outbreak! Nay. I wash my hands of it,
Because, if Herod comes again, there's naught
For me to fear: and if he come no more
A death in any shape's right opportune.

ALEX. I go. [*Turns to go.*

JOSEPH (*blocking her way*). Where?

ALEX. Firstly to the battlements
And then wherever it may please me go.

JOSEPH. Your way is open to the battlements.
The castle's barred.

ALEX. 'Twould seem, then, we are prisoners?

JOSEPH. Only till peace may be restored, no longer.
I must request——

ALEX. What brass effrontery's this?

JOSEPH. A stone is blind, a Roman javelin too;
They often find a mark where they should not;
'Twere therefore more discreet to give them room.
ALEX. (*to* MARIAMNE). I'll go aloft and try with signalling
To make our friends acquainted with our plight.
MAR. By signalling—your friends—Oh, Mother, Mother!
And so 'tis you at bottom, not the folk?
See to't the pit you dig trips not yourself.
[ALEXANDRA *turns to go.*
JOSEPH. You will permit my guardsman offer you
His escort. Philo!
ALEX. So 'tis open war?
[*Enter* PHILO. JOSEPH *speaks with him, at first softly, then aloud.*
JOSEPH. You understand?
PHILO. Yes.
JOSEPH I' the worst event!
PHILO. For that I'll wait, then——
JOSEPH And your head's my surety.
(*Aside.*) Methinks the soul of Herod's over me!
ALEX. I go in his despite. Perhaps the soldier,
Although a Galilean, may be won.
I'll try it!
[*Exit, followed by* PHILO.
JOSEPH (*aside.*) I can do no otherwise,
Howe'er it bring mistrust on me; the outbreak
Compels me to this step; I dare not now
Allow her from my sight unless I make
The dead impossible through my own folly,
For every hour this courier may come.
Himself I long have thought to see no more.
MAR. Say, when died Herod?
JOSEPH. When died he?
MAR. And how?
You surely know it since you dare so much.
JOSEPH. What do I dare then? You propose me riddles.
MAR. Naught, if you think I cannot find defence
So soon as e'er the Romans think my life
Is threatened; all, if you mistake therein.
JOSEPH. Who threatens then your life?

MAR. You ask me still?
You!
JOSEPH. I?
MAR. And can you swear the contrary?
Swear it upon your child's head? You are silent!
JOSEPH. You have no right of challenge to the swearing.
MAR. Who hears such challenge gives it of himself,
But woe to you if Herod comes again!
I'll say to him two things ere the first kiss,
I'll say to him that you devised my murder,
I'll say to him my oath; now gauge yourself
The fate that gathers for you if he comes.
JOSEPH. And what—what was the oath? If it bring horror
Yet I must know it.
MAR. Hear it to your bane!
That I with my own hand will kill myself
If he—oh had I but foreboded *this*
I had not turned me with a cold good-bye,
Nay, surely not! I would have kept the bearing
I had begun, and all would now be well,
For you at first were a far other man.
JOSEPH. For me, I've naught to fear.
MAR. Because you think
It is impossible that he return.
Who knows? And if! I hold the oath I swore,
But not till I avenge myself on you,
Avenge me on you—hear the word and tremble!
Sharp as he would avenge me. Come then, draw
Your instant sword! You dare not? I believe you!
And watch me close as e'er you can, I'll find
A certain way unto the Captain Titus.
You lost your hazard when I pierced your husk.
JOSEPH (*aside*). True, true! (*To* MARIAMNE.) I hold you to your word! You'd take
The same, the very vengeance he would wreak;
That vow you swore to me: forget it not.
MAR. So speaks a wandering wit. That Herod loves me,
Yea, loves me more than I can love myself,
There's none can doubt; no, not Salome even,

Your sinister-hearted wife, although she double
Just for that cause her hate, and even although
Just for that cause, and spurred by vengeful lust,
She may have filled you with this murder-thought.
And that it comes from her I know, and will
Pierce to her feeling nerve; her pain for you
Shall be my latest joy upon this earth.

JOSEPH. You err. But that's all one: I have your word.

MAR. You say that once again? You—impious!
Oh what an uprush of night-spawnéd thoughts
And what mistrust you wake within my breast!
You speak such words as though I had been chosen
For altar-beast and you for altar-priest—
By Herod's very self. Is't so? At parting
There fell from him—I think thereon with horror—
A word of darkness. Answer!

JOSEPH. This I give,
Soon as the need shall come, soon as I know
That he——

MAR. No more can give you level lie,
If you, poltroon and vile, charged him with what
Numbs thought with fear, unmeasured and unnamed,
To sweep your own name sweet in my esteem?
I tell you, I but listen to you now
Since now, perhaps, before I make an end,
He may step through the door and strike you down.
Be silent then for aye or speak at once.

JOSEPH. And if 'twere so? I say not it is so,
But if it were? What other would it be
Than confirmation of the thing you feel,
Than noble proof he loves as ne'er before
A man has loved his wife?

MAR. What is't you say?
Methinks my ears have heard that word before!

JOSEPH. Why, I'd have thought 'twould please your quick of pride
To know he felt not death was half so bitter
As this, the thought he'd——

MAR. Come, what will you stake
Myself can bring it for you to an end?
—As this, the thought he'd leave me here behind him
Amid a world where lives an Antony.
JOSEPH. Well—yes then! But I say not that he's said it—
MAR. He's said it? He has—Oh, what has he not?
Oh, that he came to end it!
JOSEPH. Mariamne!
(*Aside.*) My feet are in the gin! True, I did naught
But what I must; and yet a horror grips me
That he—before my eyes comes Aristobulus.
Accurséd be the dead that flings a shadow
Ere it steps into life!
MAR. Like to a crazy blister of the brain
Whose swollen puffiness at times will split,
So was it—From this hour my life begins.
Until to-day I dreamed!

SCENE 6

THE SAME. SALOME.

[*Enter a* SERVANT, *followed by* SALOME.

SALOME (*to the* SERVANT). Were you forbidden
To grant to any entry unannounced?
I take the blame.
JOSEPH. Salome, you?
SALOME. Who else?
No evil ghost! Your wife, your hapless wife
Whom once you wooed as Jacob wooed his Rachel
And whom you now—— (*To* MARIAMNE.) Accurséd, was't not even
Enough for you to turn away from me
My brother's heart? And must you now go further
And rob me of my husband? Day and night
He thinks of you as though you were a widow
Even now, and I still less than that. By day
He dogs your goings step by step; by night

He dreams of you, calls out your name in anguish
And starts up from his slumber—(*To* JOSEPH.) Did I not
Chide you this morning for't? And now to-day;
When all Jerusalem is in an uproar,
To-day he's not with me, not at the market,
Where I bade seek him, since he never came.
He is with you, and ye—ye are alone!

MAR. Then sure it is not she; it is himself!
If any remnant-doubt still gave me pause
'Tis choked by this insensate jealousy.
I was a thing to him and nothing more.

JOSEPH (*to* SALOME). I swear——

SALOME. That I am blind? No, no—I see!

MAR. The dying man whose will decreed his fig-tree
Be hewn to earth because he grudged its fruits
After his death to any other man,
The dying man were execrate, and had,
It may be, sown the tree himself and knew
That any thief, that even any murderer
Who shook its boughs must share its quickening gift—
But neither fits my case. And yet, and yet
That is an outrage Time has yet not known.

SALOME (*to* JOSEPH). You speak in vain. Commission? What commission?

MAR. Commission? Ah, that seals it! If it could be,
Now surely, now if never it could be.
Ah, but it cannot be! There is no impulse
Of baser sort that spots my innermost
For all my stormy-ridden breast. I would
Now at this moment give to Antony
The answer, yea the very self-same answer
I would have given him on our wedding-day.
It wounds me as it wounds because I feel it,
Else were I bound to suffer, yea, to pardon.

SALOME (*to* MARIAMNE). It seems for you I am not!

MAR. Nay, far from it!
Indeed you have bestowed on me the greatest
That kindness could. I, who was blind, now see;

I see full clear and that through you alone.
SALOME. You void your scorn on me? That too I'll
penance
If but my brother come again. I will
Relate him all——
MAR. What? Ay, 'tis well! Do so!
If he give ear—why not? Why do I laugh?
Is that too past belief? If he give ear
Then hear my word—I will gainsay you not.
I love myself no more enough to do it.
[*Enter hastily* ALEXANDRA.
ALEX. The King!
JOSEPH. Within the town?
ALEX. By now i' the castle!

ACT III

SCENE I

The Castle on Zion. ALEXANDRA'S *Apartments.*
ALEXANDRA. JOSEPH. SALOME.

Enter HEROD, SOEMUS, *and Retinue.*

HEROD. I'm home again. (*To* SOEMUS.) Does it stil bleed? The stone,
Though meant for me, hit you because in just
That nick of time you came to tell me something.
Your head for this time made your King a shield,
But had you stayed at post——
SOEMUS. I had not then
Received the wound nor rendered you the service,
If it be worth the name. In Galilee
That man is stoned at least who's so foolhardy
To get at loggerheads with you and me,
Since I'm your shadow or your speaking-trumpet
Or what you will.
HEROD. Yes, there the men are true—
That is, to ends of theirs; and since these ends
With mine go hand in hand, to mine as well.
SOEMUS. How true this token shows you—that you find
Myself in your chief city.
HEROD. Ay, indeed
I had not thought that I would meet you here,
For when the King is far there's double need
Among the stiff-necked provinces for watchers.
What was it then that drove you from your post?
'Twas sure some other impulse than the wish
To prove me that it might unjeopardised
Lie tenantless; or thought's instinctive feel
That a flung stone was here to intercept.
SOEMUS. I was come here to advertise the viceroy
Touching disclosures of a wondrous kind,

And tell them orally in all due haste.
I would apprise him that the Pharisees
Seek even the stubborn soil of Galilee,
Although their work is vain, to underburrow.
But all too late my warning came; I found
Jerusalem in flames by then, and could
But help extinguish them.

HEROD (*giving him his hand*). And that you did
With blood of yours!—Ah, Joseph! you? Good-day!
I thought to find you other here; but good;
Yet, for the nonce, go bring me Sameas
The Pharisee, who's held by Captain Titus
A prisoner in the mode the Scythians use.
The ironside Roman drags him, fastly bounden
Unto the tail of the war-horse he rides,
Hither and thither, since the holy zealot
Spat after him i' the open market-place.
Now he must run as he may ne'er before
Have run if he's no mind to have a tumble
And go a-draggling. Then and there 'twere better
That I had rescued him as I went past.
I' faith, 'tis sure I owe him thanks alone
That all the serpents who until to-day
Crawled stilly from my foot, are known to me.
Now I can stamp them piecemeal when I will.
[*Exit* JOSEPH.
(*To* ALEXANDRA.) I give you greeting, and from Antony
I am to make announcement that a river
Cannot be brought to judgment; and a King
Within whose land it flows with less of right
Because he did not earth it in. (*To* SOEMUS.) I were
Long since again come hither, but when friends
Together meet who seldom see each other,
They hold them fast. And so 'twill be with you
(I treat you with a foretaste) now I'm host
And have you at the longed-for last again.
And you with me must set the figs a-shaking
Just as, perforce, I aided Antony,

Pah, gluttony! in stream of old Falernian
To smother lampreys and call many a prank
From out our bygone times to jog remembrance
With freshening fillip. So, resolve your mind
To do like service. If I scarce may have
Enough of the triumphant hero in me
To have you so commanded to my presence
As he commanded me to his, with show
Of hearing me on some insipid charge,
His brow like Cæsar's wrinkled and his arm
With lightning and with thunderbolt beweaponed,
And all to be assured—this was the ground
On which he did it—that I came for certain,
If such be so, at least to-day's good chance
That puts you in my hands I'll use to profit
And say, as he, when speeches on your office
Begin— " If you conduct it as you should
It does not need your every wink o' the eye.
You come so seldom that it seems you're loath
To be here! "

SOEMUS. Lord, you do me an injustice;
And yet I have no cause to come too often.

HEROD (*to* SALOME). And you here too? So you have learnt at last
To trick your wits, when you meet Mariamne,
With fancy-thoughts that you look in a mirror
And spy your own reflected counterpart?
'Twas oft my counsel when you eyed her sourly;
It never pleased. Take not the jest amiss.
There is no evil doing in the hour
When friends are come a-meeting. But where is she?
I heard it said that she was with her mother
And so came here.

SALOME. She went when she had learnt
That you were nearing.

HEROD. Went? Impossible!
But good. She did it since 'tis solitude
Befits reunion. (*Aside.*) Heart, will you bear her anger
Nor rather make amends? (*Aloud.*) I follow her;

Her delicate feeling's right.

SALOME. Go, self-deceiver!
The fright of seeing you recalled to life,
The shame of having credited your death,
The greater shame of her spoiled widowhood—
O'ersmooth it all with fondling gloss of shyness
The maiden feels who ne'er has known a man
Nor seen the shivering woman taken in sin!
— She went from fear!

HEROD. From fear? Look round about you,
We are not here alone.

SALOME. That's opportune!
If before witnesses I bring my plaint
It will be guaranteed your surer ear
And crushed the harder underfoot.

HEROD. You place
Yourself twixt her and me? Have then a care!
You may be trampled piecemeal.

SALOME. This time, not!
Although I know how small the sister counts
When you are dealing with the Maccabean,
This time——

HEROD. I tell you one thing! If, the day
On which she first was given to my sight,
A man were risen in accusation 'gainst her,
He had not easily obtained my hearing,
But yet more easily than now. Take that for warning.
I am so heavy in her debt that she
Can owe no debt to me. I feel that deep.

SALOME. Ah, so she has free charter?

HEROD. Any mask
To wear that she thinks well for your hoodwinking
If she would kill the drive of time with you.

SALOME. Then—then I must be mute. What use in speaking?
For whatsoe'er I chose to tell you, ever
Your answer would be ready—mummery!
At least this mummery has had good luck.
Not me alone but all the world with me

It's taken by the ear; it costs you honour
And me my rest, however you may swear
That Joseph's only done what duty bade
When he—see to't if any man believe you!

HEROD. When he—what underdrift is lurking? End it!
But no—not yet——(*To a servant.*) I bid the Queen
be craved
To grant to us her presence. Is it not
As though the whole o' the world were spider-clean
And all had nested them within my house,
That when for once I see the blue of Heaven
They forthwith might o'erhang it with their webs
And do the work of clouds? True, strange it is
That she comes not. She should, sheer-forced, have
kissed me
Caught in the ungoverned all-compelling moment,
And then she might have vexed her lips with biting
When even at that the Ghost refused its quittance.
(*To* SALOME.) Know you what you have ventured?
Know you, woman?
I was rejoiced! D'you understand? And now—
Once on a day the Earth when I was thirsty
Spilled from my hand a goblet filled with wine
Because it fell to quaking ere my lips
Could drain it; I forgave it since I must;
On you I could avenge me.

[*Enter* MARIAMNE.

SCENE 2

HEROD. MARIAMNE. ALEXANDRA. SALOME.

HEROD. Fling you down
Before her, who in all these witness-eyes
Have put the offending tarnish on her name,
And I'll not do it!

SALOME. Ha!

ALEX. What may that mean?

HEROD. Well, Mariamne?

MAR. What commands the King?
I have been summoned and I have appeared.

ALEX. Is this the wife who swore to kill herself
If he returned not hither?
HEROD. This your greeting?
MAR. The King bade summon me that I should greet him?
I greet him; and thereby the work is done.
ALEX. You're sore in error. Here you stand arraigned.
HEROD. There was a charge preferred. Before I gave
The charge a hearing I sent word to beg you
Come hither, but in truth with no desire
That you should counter it with your defence,
Only because I think that of itself
'Twill lose its breath and die before your presence.
MAR. To hinder that I should again begone.
HEROD. What, Mariamne? You were never ranked
Among those souls of despicable kind
Who, when their foeman's countenance or back
Comes to first gaze, forgive and fresh their grudging
Because they are too weak for genuine hate,
Too tiny for the fuller, greater mood.
By what then is your deepest so transformed
That now so late you should companion them?
What? When I left you had for me farewell
And I had thought that this a claim would give me
Upon your welcome. You deny me that?
And you stand here as though the berg and vale
Still lay between that kept us so long sundered?
You step aback when I would come anear?
Is't then that my return is hateful to you?
MAR. How should it be? Indeed it gives my life
Again to me.
HEROD. Your life? What word is this?
MAR. You'll not deny you understand the word.
HEROD (*aside*). Can she then know it? (*To* MARIAMNE.)
Come! [MARIAMNE *does not follow.*
Leave us alone!
(*To* ALEXANDRA.) You'll pardon?
ALEX. Ay! [*Exit, followed by the others.*
MAR. So craven, then!
HEROD. So craven?

MAR. And also—how's it nameable?
HEROD. And also?
(*Aside.*) 'Twere horrible! I'd never quench it in her!
MAR. His wife, free-willed, may grave-ward follow him,
The headsman's hand may thrust her under earth—
All's one if he make sure she dies. He leaves her
No time even for self-sacrificial death.
HEROD. She knows it!
MAR. And is Antony a man
As I till now believed, a man like you,
Or else a demon, as you must believe
Since you're in desperate doubt if in my bosom
Some last lorn duty-sense, some remnant pride
Would make a stand against him when, all dripping
With blood of yours, he faced me as a wooer
And made assault of storm to pass the time
Which the Egyptian Woman leaves him free?
HEROD (*aside*). But how? but how?
MAR. At least he were compelled
To have you dead before he came a-wooing,
And if you feel yourself—I were not able
To think it, but I see't—so null a nithing
That you despair his scale to counterpoise
With the pure metal of your manhood's worth
In your wife's heart, what justifies you then
To hold my worth so light that you could fear
Myself would never spurn the murderer back?
O double insult!
HEROD (*breaking out*). Tell me for what price
You learnt this secret! 'Twas not lightly venal!
A head was pledged me for it!
MAR. O Salome,
How well you knew your brother!—Question him
Whose treachery told me what he had received.
From me expect to hear no answer more.
[*She turns away.*
HEROD. I'll show you quickly how I'll question him!
Soemus!
[*Enter* SOEMUS.

Scene 3

HEROD. MARIAMNE. SOEMUS.

HEROD. Is my kinsman Joseph here?
SOEMUS. He's tarrying with Sameas.
HEROD. Lead him hence!
I gave a letter to him. Have the letter
Forthwith delivered. You afford him escort
And see that all be loyally fulfilled
Whate'er this letter orders.
SOEMUS. 'Twill be done. [*Exit.*
HEROD. Whate'er you may suspect or think or know,
You have misprised me.
MAR. On a brother's murder
The seal you've planted of necessity
To which the neck must bow though sharp the shudder,
But you'll ne'er have the plausible success
To stamp this seal upon my murder too;
That murder must remain the thing it is,
An outrage that at most may be repeated
But never, never can be overgone.
HEROD. I would not have the courage for an answer
Unless, whate'er the deed I may have ventured,
I had not been assured of the event;
But then I was assured and was so only
Because I set my all upon the hazard.
I did what on the field of fight the soldier
Is wont to do when all his last's at stake.
He flings the standard which has led him onward,
On which his fortunes and his honour hang,
Determined in the mellay of the foemen
But not because he thinks to give't for spoil.
He brings the wreath, which now no more by courage
Only by hope forlorn was to be reached,
The victory-wreath, albeit tattered, with him.
You called me craven. If the man is so

Who fears a seated demon in himself,
Then I at times am craven, but alone
When I must reach my goal on crooked by-paths,
When I must duck my head and make a show
As though I were no more the man I am.
Then anguish takes me that I might too soon
Erect my bearing, and to tame my pride,
Which, lightly strung, might spur me on thereto,
I knit into me what is more than Self
And which with me must stand or suffer fall.
Know you what waited on me as I went?
No dual fight, and less by far a court;
A tyrant whimsy-willed to whom I must
Forswear myself, and yet I surely had
Forsworn no tittle if—I thought of you
And gnashed my teeth not once—and whatsoe'er
He may have bid the Man and King within me,
Haling me on from gorge to gorge, yet holding
My teasing quittance back in sinister silence
—I took it all as patient as a slave.

MAR. You speak in vain. In me humanity
Is shamed by you. My pain each soul must share.
Who's human is like me, nor has he need
To be my kin, or woman as I am.
When you with murder secret-still had robbed
My brother, only they could share my weeping
Who might have brothers; and the rest might all
With eyes still dry of tears, step from me sidewards
Refusing me their pity. But a life
Has every man, and none allows his life
Be taken from him but by God alone
Who was the Giver of it. Such an outrage
Is damned by mankind's universal race,
Is damned by Fate who suffered it begin,
'Tis true, but not succeed; is damned by you.
And if the Human in me is through you
So deeply hurt, what must the woman feel?
How stand I now to you and you to me?

Scene 4

Herod. Mariamne. Salome.

Salome (*entering hastily*). What plan you, Man of Horror? Ah, I see
My husband led away; and he conjures me
Beseech you for your mercy—but I wavered
Because I bear him grudge nor understand him,
And now—and now I hear things gruesome whispered.
They say—they lie! Say so!

Herod. Your husband dies!

Salome. Before he is condemned? Ah, never, never!

Herod. Himself is his condemner; for the letter
That forfeits him to death was in his hands
Before he played me traitor, and he knew
What penalty it was awaited him
If done; he put him 'neath that penalty
And in its spite he did it.

Salome. Herod, hear me!
Do you know that for sure? I did accuse him
And felt beneath my charge the base of right;
I had my grounds therefor—and that he loved her
Was open fact; he had indeed for me
No single further glance, no press of hand—
He was by day about her when he could be.
And in the night his dreams betrayed to me
How firm she held his thought in grip; all that
Is true and more; but, for all that, it follows
Not yet that she must love him in requital
And less than all that she—ah no, ah no!
'Twas jealousy that tore me on—forgive!
(*To* Mariamne.) You too forgive!
O God, and time flies fast! They said—shall I
Then love you as I hated you? Then be
No longer dumb! Speak! Say that he is guiltless
And plead for his reprieve even as myself.

Mar. He is!

HEROD. In her construction, not in mine.
MAR. In yours as well.
HEROD. You must then have known nothing;
And now a nothing can be his excuse.
And if I make him now a gift to death
Without foretrial, 'tis because my will
Is bent to show you that my thought of you
Is nowise base and mean, and that I rue
The rash-born word that fell from my first wrath,
And more because I know that he can have
Nothing to say to me.

[*Enter* SOEMUS.

SCENE 5

THE SAME. SOEMUS.

SOEMUS. The bloody work
Is brought to end; but all Jerusalem
Stands stock-still asking why the man whom you
Ordained to represent your person when you
Made journey hence, now at your coming back
Should be compelled to lose his head.
SALOME (*collapsing*). Woe's me!

[MARIAMNE *goes to catch her.*

SALOME. Away, away! (*To* HEROD.) And she?
HEROD. Content you, sister!
Your husband has most heinously deceived me—
SALOME. And she?
HEROD. What you think is not so.
SALOME. Not so?
How then? Your will's to save her? If my husband
Deceived you heinously she did it too;
For what I said is true, and every man
Shall know it though he not yet know. And you
Shall wash yourself in her blood as in his,
Else ne'er be clean again. At least that's so! [1]

[1] These words are a sneer, being a repetition of the twice-repeated phrase "*nicht so.*" Salome's "*nicht so?*" means "not in that way?" but Herod uses the same interrogative form in the sense of "*nicht wahr?*" The familiar touch brings out the sneer.

HEROD. By all that I hold sacred——
SALOME. Nay then, name
His misdeed to me if it were not such.
HEROD. Were I to name it I would make it greater.
There was a secret I'd entrusted to him
On which my All was hanging, and this secret
He has betrayed; shall I then do the same?
SALOME. Pitiful shuffling for my scare contrived!
You think you can outwit me? You believe
In all that I have said, and yet you are
Too strengthless-willed your love to understifle
And rather choose the shrine to overcloak
That you'll not stamp to nothing. But unless
You murder me, your sister, with my husband,
It will miscarry with you. (*To* MARIAMNE.) He
is dead!
Now you can swear what pleases you; he will
Not contradict you! [*Exit.*
HEROD. Follow her, Soemus,
And seek to win her to a calm! You know her
And she ere now has given you willing ear.
SOEMUS. Those times are now no longer; but I go!
[*Exit.*
MAR. (*aside*). For him who meant my murder I might
well
Be loath to supplicate; and yet I shudder
That not the respite even for that was left me.
HEROD (*aside*). 'Twas soon or late with him! In the
next war
He had been stationed in Uriah's place!
And yet I rue this hasty hotness now.
[*Enter* A COURIER.

SCENE 6

HEROD. MARIAMNE. A COURIER.

COURIER. I'm sent by Antony!
HEROD. Ah, then I know
What you are bringing me. I must make ready!
The final feud of which he spoke begins.

COURIER. Octavian, making course for Africa,
Has taken ship; to meet him Antony
Sets out in haste with Cleopatra joined
Intending instant close at Actium——
HEROD. And I, I, Herod, am to make the third!
'Tis good! I make the march to-day. Soemus,
For all this sorry plight of things, supplies me.
Good that he came!
MAR. Once more he marches forth!
Eternal One, my thanks!
HEROD (*observing her*). Ha!
COURIER. Great King, no!
He needs you not at Actium; he wills
That the Arabians, who have raised rebellion,
Be blocked by you from coupling with the foemen.
This is the service he would have of you.
HEROD. It lies with him that place to delegate
Where I shall profit him.
MAR. Once more! Then all
Is fresh unravelled!
HEROD (*as before*). How my wife is glad!
(*To the* COURIER.) Tell him—you know't already—
(*Aside.*) Brow unwrinkled
And hands as though for thankful prayer enfolded—
That is her heart!
COURIER. Have you naught else for me?
MAR. Now will I know if it were but a fever,
The fever of a passion frenzy-fired
That madded his poised mind, or if I saw
His innermost in clear sane deed betrayed.
Now will I know!
HEROD (*to the* COURIER). Naught, naught!
[*Exit* COURIER.
(*To* MARIAMNE.) Your countenance
Has taken gladder glow! But do not hope
Too much. One does not always die in war.
I've cheated many a one ere now.
MAR. (*about to speak, but interrupting herself*). No, no!
HEROD. The issue now involves a hotter fight
Than then, I grant you. Every fight beside

Was waged for something in the world, but this
Is waged for the world's self; it makes decisive
Who's destinied world-master—Antony,
Wencher and trencherman, or else Octavian
Who's empty of his merit when he swears
That he was never drunken in his life.
There'll be a pretty buffet-bout, and yet
It may be that your wish be not fulfilled,
That Death may pass me with unbloodied sword.

MAR. My wish! 'Tis well! My wish—then it is good.
O Heart, be quelled! Betray you not! The proving
Is none if he should sense what quicks your throb.
If he stand proof how you will be rewarded!
And how you can reward him! Let him then
Misprise you. Prove him. Think upon the end,
And on the garland you dare reach to him—
When he has trod the Demon underfoot.

HEROD. I give you thanks; you now have brought my heart
A lightening. Though on the human in you
I may have done no outrage, this is clear—
That I have done no outrage on your love;
And, for this reason, by your love I beg you
Not for one final sacrifice, yet hope
That you will yield to me one final duty.
And this I hope not for my sake alone,
I hope it for your own sake even more,
You will not wish that, at this latest hour,
I see you mistily; you will for this—
That I myself the dead man's mouth have locked,
Open your own and clear my wondering
How it has come he made his head your gift.
And you will do it for the human in you,
You'll do it, too, because you honour Self.

MAR. Because I honour Self I'll do it not.

HEROD. So you yourself refuse the fair and fitting?

MAR. The fair and fitting! So 'twere fair and fitting
That I, on knees before you in abjection,
Swear "Lord, your villein came me not anigh!
And that you may believe—for to your faith

I have no right, albeit I am your wife—
Hear this thing yet and that!" O fie, O fie![1]
No Herod! If your itching later ask
I answer you—perhaps. Now I am dumb.

HEROD. But if you had been large enough of loving
To grant me grace for all that, out of loving,
I did, I never would have asked you thus.
Now that I know how small your love is, now
I must re-ask the question; for whate'er
Your love vouchsafe me as a bond of surety
Cannot be greater than your love itself.
And Love to which Life is a treasure higher
Than the Beloved, is to me a nothing.

MAR. Yet am I silent!

HEROD. Then I damn myself
The mouth whose overpride disdains to swear
No other one has kissed it, nevermore
Myself to kiss till such it lowly do.
Yea, if there were a means could give me potence
Your memory within my heart t' extinguish,
And if the drastic stab that pierced my eyes,
Oblivioning the mirror of your beauty,
Could also give your image to oblivion,
Now at this very hour I'd stab them through.

MAR. Be your mood's master, Herod! For perhaps
Even in this Now you've Fate within your hands
And you can guide it wheresoe'er you will.
To every man there comes the point of time
When to himself the steerer of his star
Gives o'er the reins. And this alone is ill—
That he knows not the point of time; it may be
Each one that past him rolls. I have monition
For you 'tis this one; therefore keep a check!
The track of life your chart is now designing,
That track, perchance, unto the end you wander.
Will you do that in the wild rush of wrath?

HEROD. I fear but half the truth's in your monition.
The turning-point is there, but 'tis for you.
For I, what wish I then? why this—naught further,

[1] *See* note 8, p. 180.

A means wherewith to frighten bogy-dreams.[1]

MAR. I'll understand you not! I've borne you children,
Have thought of them! Then you may ask yourself
What's possible.

HEROD. Who's silent, even as you,
Wakes the misthought he has no heart that dares
To say the truth, yet has no will to lie.

MAR. No further!

HEROD. Nay, no further; and farewell!
And if I come again misgrudge it me
Not all too sorely.

MAR. Herod!

HEROD. Be assured
I take no more the thing I took to-day,
A greeting wrested.

MAR. Nay, 'twill be no more
A needful thing. (*To Heaven.*) Eternal, guide his heart!
I gave him pardon for a brother's murder,
I was prepared his deathward way to follow,
I am so still; and can a mortal more?
Thou didst what ne'er before thou didst—Thou rolledst
The wheel of time aback; it stands once more
Even as it erewhile stood. Then let him now
Take other course, and I forget what's happened.
Forget it even as if in heat of fever
He'd dealt me with his sword the stroke of death
And bound himself my wound that I grew whole.
(*To* HEROD.) You'll come again?

HEROD. If you should see me coming
Then call for fetters. Let it be your proof
That I have gotten crazy wits.

MAR. You will
Repent that word—oh, Heart, be quelled!—you will! [*Exit.*

[1] *See* note 9, p. 180.

Scene 7

Herod *alone.*

Herod. 'Tis true I went too far. When half-way launched
I told myself the same. But not less true
If she loved me the offence she would condone.
If she loved me! Has she loved, truth to truth?
I think it. Ay, but now—oh, how the Dead One
Is skilled to vengeance even in the grave!
I made away with him my crown t' assure,
He took what dipped the heavier scale—her heart.
For she has shown me since her brother died
Strange alteration; though my nice regard
Has never found between her and her mother
The tiniest tell-tale vestige of resemblance,
To-day showed more than once the linking touches;
Thus I can give no more the old-time faith.
That is a surety; must it therefore be
An equal surety that she has deceived?
The guarantee that in her love had lain
Is fallen away, but still there is a second
Lies in that pride of hers; will not a pride,
Superb-disdainful of its self-defence,
Even more disdain the sullying of self?
Ay, but she knows it! Joseph! Why can man
But kill and nevermore the dead awaken?
He should be able both to do or neither.
He takes his vengeance too! He comes not! Yet
I see him there! "My Lord commanded?"
Monstrous!
I'll not believe 't! Salome, keep you silent
Howe'er it came it came not so! Perchance
The eating secret like embowelled fire
Forced way through him; or he perchance betrayed it
Because he deemed me as one lost, and now
Was fain to be atoned with Alexandra

Before the tidings came. Well, we shall see!
For she must stand the proof. Had I but guessed
That she could come by knowledge of it, never
Had I so far been gone. Now that she knows,
From her revenge I now will need to fear
The thing that from her soul's unstableness
Perchance I feared unjustly. I must fear
That on my grave she'll make my wedding-mirth.
Soemus came at nick of time. He is
A man who, if I were not in the world,
Had stood where I now stand. How true he thinks,
How zealously he serves, he proves by coming.
I give him now the charge. I know from him
She lures naught out of lock if she essay
The man in him to tempt. If he betray me
She pays me such a price as—Then, Salome,
Then you were in the right!—Now to probation!
[*Exit.*

ACT IV

Scene 1

The Castle on Zion. Mariamne's *Apartments.*
Mariamne. Alexandra.

Alex. You pose me with your riddles. First the oath
" I kill myself if he return no more! "
Then bitter coldness when he came, so froward
That he was mortified as keen as I
Rejoiced; and now again the deepest mourning!
I'd gladly see the man who comprehends you.
Mar. If 'tis so hard, why do you plague yourself?
Alex. And then the tart repugnance in the manner
With which you fend Soemus to his distance!
His looks betray there's something on his heart——
Mar. You think so?
Alex. Ay, and he would make avowal
But dare not venture it; he would perhaps,
If he should see you leap into the Jordan,
Be dubious if he were privileged
To rescue you from death; and he were right,
For this blunt gracelessness is past all bounds.
Mar. You'll own at least that Herod cannot say
I probed the virtue of his friend, and lured
His secret, if he has one, out of him
With cozening-tongued duplicity. No, no;
It lies on the knees of God if I should learn it;
And my heart says I take no risk therein.[1]
[*Enter* Sameas, *with fetters on his hands.*

Scene 2

The Same. Sameas.

Sameas. The Lord is great!
Mar. He is.
Alex. You free, and yet

[1] *See* note 10, p. 181.

In fetters? Yet one riddle more!

SAMEAS. These fetters
I lay not by again. Jerusalem
Shall day by day have brought to its remembrance
That Jonah's progeny in prison sat.

ALEX. How came you out, then? Did you bribe the gaolers?

SAMEAS. What, I? the gaolers?

ALEX. True, with what I know not.
You still have on your shirt of camel's hair,
And that they freed you for a wild bees' nest
Which you, with every hollow tree familiar,
Could have betrayed to them for ransom-price—
That I misdoubt, for there's enough of honey.

SAMEAS. Why, what a question! 'Twas Soemus' self
That oped the gates for me.

MAR. How could he dare that?

SAMEAS. How then? And was't not you that gave him orders?

MAR. I?

SAMEAS. No? And yet I thought 'twas what he said.
I may have erred, for I was just then saying
The last psalm backwards-way when he came in
And slackly gave him only half my ear.
Well, good! It seems the Lord has done't, and I
Must go unto the Temple there to thank Him,
For I have naught to do in David's castle.

MAR. The Lord!

SAMEAS. The Lord. Was I endungeoned justly?

MAR. The times are now no more in which the Lord
Spoke with the naked word unto His People.
We have instead the Law; that speaks for Him.
Extinguished is the Pillar of Fire and Cloud
Through which our Fathers in the Wilderness
Were shown the paths he led them, and the Prophets
Are dumb as He.

ALEX. Nay, not yet wholly so!
Only a short time since there was a fire
Foretold by one—a fire that came to pass.

MAR. Granted; but 'twas himself at mid of night

Applied the kindling flame.

SAMEAS. Woman, blaspheme not!

MAR. And I blaspheme not! No, I say what happened.
The man's a Pharisee like you yourself.
He speaks like you, he raves like you. The fire
Was meant to prove to us that he was truly
A prophet, and could see into the future.
But still a soldier caught him in the act.

SAMEAS. A Roman?

MAR. Yes.

SAMEAS. He lied! He was perhaps
Suborned. He was suborned thereto by Herod,
Suborned by you yourself.

MAR. Sirrah, your place!

SAMEAS. You are his wife, you are the wife o' the miscreant
Who overweens him into the Messiah.
If you can lock him in your arms and kiss him
You can do other things for him as well.

ALEX. He overweens him now into Messiah?

SAMEAS. He does! He flung the words into my teeth
When to the dungeon he had ordered me.
I shrieked to God. I cried—" Look on thy folk
And send Messiah unto us, whom Thou
Hast promised for the time of direst need!
The direst need's upon us! " Then replied he
With a proud curl o' the lip—" He's long since here;
But ye—ye know it not! 'Tis I myself! "

ALEX. Now, Mariamne?

SAMEAS. Then, with godless wit
He proved that we're a Folk of scatter-brains
And he alone has got an uncracked pate.
We did not dwell for naught on the Dead Sea
That is devoid of motion—ebb and flood—
And therefore poisons all the world with pest.
It was a trusty mirror of ourselves!
And he was bent to pang us into living
Were he compelled e'en Moses' numskull book—
So unabashed his words—with force to tatter.
It was for that sole cause our river Jordan,

Whose clear wave laughed and leapt throughout our land,
Symbolled us not instead of a dull bog.

ALEX. He flung the mask so wholly from him?

SAMEAS. Ay!
And yet perchance he deemed me, when he did it,
As good as dead by then, for straight thereon
He gave the word of death.

MAR. He had been goaded.
He found revolt for greeting.

SAMEAS. Now I warn you
What is your duty. Be renounced from him
As he has now renounced his God. Thereby
You can chastise him, for he loves you dear.
My only notion, when Soemus freed me,
Was that you'd done it. If you do it not
Chide not the shaft that from the welkin falls
As undeserved when it strikes you with him.
I go to sacrifice.

ALEX. Take then the victims
From out my stall.

SAMEAS. I take them where they're missed,
The widow-woman's lamb, the poor man's sheep.
What is your ox to God? [*Exit.* *Enter* SOEMUS.

SCENE 3

MARIAMNE. ALEXANDRA. SOEMUS.

SOEMUS. Pardon!

MAR. Indeed,
I wished even now to have you called. Come in!

SOEMUS. 'Tis the first time you had such wish.

MAR. Ay, true!

SOEMUS. You've parried me till now.

MAR. And have you then
Sought for me? Have you aught to seek from me?
I cannot think it so.

SOEMUS. At least the former;
Behold in me the truest of your servants.

MAR. I did, but do so now no more.
SOEMUS. No more?
MAR. How could you let that rebel, him whom Herod
Ordered to prison, have his dungeon opened?
Is he still King, or is he King no more?
SOEMUS. The answer's not so easy as you think.
MAR. And if you find it hard you'll pay it dearly.
SOEMUS. You've not yet heard the news the fight is lost?
MAR. The fight at Actium's reported lost?
SOEMUS. Yes. Antony is fallen by his own hand,
With like death Cleopatra.
MAR. What, could she
Have such fine nerve? Time was she could not bear
A sword to sight, and shuddered back at his
Whene'er he held it toward her for a mirror.
SOEMUS. Titus the Captain had these very tidings.
Octavian curses that no means were used
To hinder them. Myself I read the letter.
MAR. Then Death for some long time has had his share
And every head stands firmer than it stood
Ere then.
SOEMUS. You think so?
MAR. Why that riddling smile?
SOEMUS. You do not know Octavian, it would seem.
He will not ask Death if his maw be queasy;
He'll find the friends of Antony of use
To serve him yet another meal, and one
Where tasty tit-bits will not be so scarce.
MAR. That touches Herod?
SOEMUS. Well, if he should hold
To what he purposed——
MAR. What was that?
SOEMUS. He said:—
"I have no further love for Antony,
Far sooner do I hate him; but I will
Stand at his side unto the latest hour
Although I fear that he is doomed to fall.
I owe it to myself if not to him."
MAR. Right kingly spoke!
SOEMUS. Ay, true, right kingly spoke!

Only Octavian's not the man t'admire it,
And Herod if he do so——

MAR. Who dares doubt it?

SOEMUS. Then he's a lost man too, or black affront
Has smirched Octavian's name when rumour said
The mighty slaughter following Caesar's death
Was written on his reckoning.

MAR. That you're fast
In faith on such an outcome, and that Herod
Is ranked by you with death, is clear enough,
Else had you never dared what you have dared.
Ay, and the shudder takes me, I confess it,
At your calm certainty. You are no fool
And without ground would never dare so much.
But, howsoe'er it be, this thing is true—
I'm still alive, and I, yes I, shall show you
That I am skilled to render him obedience
Even in his death; there's not a sole command
That he has given shall not be executed.
Such be the Dead Man's sacrifice.

SOEMUS. Not one?
I doubt it, Queen! (*Aside.*) Now let the blow come down!

MAR. As true as I am Maccabee you send
This Sameas again into his dungeon.

SOEMUS. If such your will demand, 'tis done; and if
You will yet more, if he shall die the death
The King had threatened, speak and he is dead.
But now vouchsafe a question of your grace—
Shall I take you, that thus the sacrifice
You think to yield be full and blemishless,
Shall I take you and pierce you with a sword-thrust?
For such injunction too I have from him.

MAR. Woe!

ALEX. Nevermore!

MAR. And so the end is come!
And what an end! One that its own beginning
Engulfs with all beside. The time that's past,
The time to come, dissolve to naught in me.

Naught I have had and naught I have and naught
I shall have. Oh, was mortal e'er so poor?
ALEX. Whatever misdeed hatched and wrought by Herod
You told me, every several one I'd credit,
But this——
MAR. Misdoubt it not, 'tis fixed and sure.
ALEX. You say't yourself?
MAR. O God, I know wherefore!
ALEX. Then must you know the deed before you!
MAR. Ay!
[*She thrusts the dagger at herself.*
ALEX. (*preventing her*). Mad fool! Is this his due? Is it his due?
That you should play the butcher on yourself?
MAR. A topsy-turvy freak! My thanks! This office
He'd chosen for himself. (*Throws the dagger away.*)
Tempter, begone!
ALEX. You'll seek a refuge under Rome's protection!
MAR. On none who has a thing at heart to do
I'll put the hindrance. I myself, I give
A feast to-night.
ALEX. A feast?
MAR. And there I dance——[1]
Yes, yes, that is the way!
ALEX. To gain what end?
MAR. Hey, servants! [*Enter* MOSES *and* SERVANTS.
Fling the splendid state-rooms wide
And summon all that can be jubilant!
Put fire to every candle that will burn,
Pluck all the flowers from stem that are not faded!
There is no need that any now survive.
(*To* MOSES.) You tricked our wedding once in famous trappings,
Your task to-day's a feast more brilliant still.
Spare nothing therefore. (*Advancing.*) Herod, tremble now
Though never yet before in life you trembled!
SOEMUS (*approaching her*). I feel your smart as you do.

[1] *See* note 11, p. 181.

MAR. Keep your pity,
I'll rob you not! You are no butcher's boor,
I dare not doubt it, you have given me proof!
But that has turned you traitor, and to traitors
I give no thanks nor bear them round my person
Whatever use they may be in this world.
For that's not judged awry. Were you the man
You seemed to be, it had been forced on God
To work a wonder; He were forced to lend
The very air the tongue it lacks for utterance.
That He foresaw or ere your clay He shaped
And made the first of hypocrites—made you!
SOEMUS. That thing I am not! I was Herod's friend,
His weapon-brother and his shoulder-fellow,
Before he scaled the throne! I was his servant,
His truest servant, since he's been a king,
But only so as long as he could hold
The Man in me inviolate and the Human,
As I in him the Hero and the Lord.
He did so till, the eyes of the dissembler
For the first time unworthily down-drooping,
He gave the word of Blood through which he doomed,
All-heartless, me and you to certain death,
Through which he doomed me to your folk's revenge,
To Roman rage, and to his own slant spite,
And you to be the prey of my sword's point.
That was my proof how high he rated me.
MAR. Did you not tell him how your heart recoiled?
SOEMUS. I did it not because I would protect you.[1]
I took his charge in show and hypocrited,
If you will have the word, that thus no other
Take it instead from him and stab me down.
A Galilean had the deed accomplished.
MAR. I own me wrong. You stand with him as I;
You have, as I, in your most Holy Place
Felt hurt; as I, am slighted to a Thing,
For what he is as spouse he is as friend.[2]

[1] *See* note 12, p. 181. [2] *See* note 13, p. 181.

Come to my feast. [*Exit.*

ALEX. So you, it seems, were waiting for your time
As I was!

SOEMUS. For my time? How mean you that?

ALEX. I've often seen it with a wondering eye
How, when the King gives thanks for his high office
Unto the Roman's whim (the heady swiller!)
And not to lineage and pride of birth,
You bent your back as though you seemed, like him,
Forgetful that you were his equal peer.
But now I pierce your mask; it was your wish
To lull him from suspicion!

SOEMUS. There you err.
I spoke the truth in all. His equal peer
I do not deem myself nor ever shall.
How many a paltry wight there is I know
Who, just because his blood's no kin of his,
Yields muttering homage; others too, I know,
Keep troth alone for Mariamne's sake.
But I am never bonded with that brood
That rather to a baby's sword is loyal,
If it be birthright, than a hero's sword
That is not wrought till smithied out of fire.
I ever saw the higher soul in him,
And when the weapon-brother dropped his shield
I raised it for him with as ready will
As e'er I raised his sceptre for the King.
The crown and the first woman: both I yielded
With grudgeless heart, for I had felt his worth.

ALEX. But you too are a man!

SOEMUS. That I am not
Forgetful of such truth I prove you now.
There's none so great that I'm a working-tool
Fit to his use. Who calls on me for service
That rendered or not rendered, come what may,
Makes me to sure and shameful death devote,
That man annuls my every bond, to him
My duty is to show that 'twixt the King
And slave there is an intermediate stage
And that the Man takes stand on this.

ALEX. To me
'Tis one what ground you had. Enough; you've come
To join my faction.
SOEMUS. Fear no battle more,
He is as good as dead. Octavian
Is scarce an Antony who lets the flesh
Be hacked from body and forgives the deed
Because he can admire the hand that does it.
He only sees the strokes.
ALEX. And what says Titus?
SOEMUS. He thinks as I do. I had Sameas
Set free alone because it is my wish
To answer my account. Indeed I had
No other way to audience with the Queen.
Now knows she what she needs must know, and now
When the death-tidings come is strong to meet them.
That was my aim. A noble heart! and kill her?
Her very tears would rouse the soul of pity!
ALEX. Ay, true! And what a tender husband! Seek her,
Persuade her only that she give herself
To Rome for shelter, and attend the feast
Which is the signal that she breaks with Herod
Be he now dead or living.
SOEMUS (*following her*). He is dead!

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE 4

The Castle on Zion. A Hall.

MOSES, ARTAXERXES, JEHU, *and other* SERVANTS *preparing a feast.*

Afterwards SOEMUS, SILO, JUDAS.

MOSES. Come, Artaxerxes! Still with wits a-rambling?
Look sharp, look sharp! You play no clock with us.
ART. Had you done that for livelong years, as I,
You'd be in just the case that touches me,

More so if every night you got to dreaming
You had the old-time post still in your care.
I make machine-like grasp with my right hand
Toward my left hand's pulse-tick, counting, counting,
And counting off to sixty ere the thought
Comes over me I am a clock no more.

MOSES. Then once for ever—mark ye that with us
You're not to take the time. We have for that
The sand and the sun-dial. For yourself,
You'll take the time like all of us—for action.
Sheer lazy-lumpishness!

ART. Nay, let me swear it!

MOSES. Peace, peace! You've never counted at your meals.
What's more, oath-swearing's not the mode with us,
And (*aside*) if the King had not been half a heathen
We'd not be blessed with this outlandish slave.
Why, here the music-makers come! Look sharp!
[*Goes out to the others.*

JEHU. Say, is it really true, this tale of you
They tell?

ART. Why what's to stop it being true?
And must I then a hundred times aver it?
At the great satrap's court I was a clock,
Well-off at that, much better than with you.
At nights I had a spell, then 'twas my brother,
And in the day too when I went to eat.
And I must say I do not thank your King
That with the other prisoners of war
He dragged me here. True, toward the end my post
Was somewhat hard. They marched me to the field
And what with arrows right and left a-flying
And men a-falling, you will botch your count
More easily of course than in a hall
Where folks are come together for the dancing.
I screwed my eyes up tight, for I'm no hero
Such as my father was. He found an arrow
Standing at post—he was a clock like us,

Me and my brother, every one a-clocking—
Even then he called the hour and died. What say ye?
That was a man! A trifle over-kind
That trick of Fate to drive at him the arrow!

JEHU. And have you then no sand among your people
That you must do this?

ART. We? Have *we* no sand?
Enough to blot and bury all Judaea!
It's just because the satrap there with us
Will have things better done than others do them.
Why, know you not a man's pulse tallies truer,
If he be sound and have no fevered blood,
Than ever sand of yours runs through its pipes?
And have your dials any jot of use
If it should please the sun to stop his shining?
(*Counts*). One! Two!

MOSES (*coming back*). Off! Off! The guests are coming now!

ART. So that's the feast? Why *there* I saw feasts, look ye,
Where never fruit went past the lips if not
Brought from some foreign part; where penalty,
Oft the death-penalty, was fixed if ever
A single water-drop were drunk; where people
All trussed with hempen cerements and with pitch
Beplastered, in the garden-parks at nights
Were burnt for torches——

MOSES. Peace! What evil then
Had those poor fellows on the satrap done?

ART. Done? Naught at all! With us a funeral
Is far more gorgeous than a wedding here.

MOSES. And I suppose you gobble up your dead?
It pairs well with the rest o' the tale!

ART. But then
Is it not true as well that once your Queen
Melted a pearl to nothing in her wine,
That was more costly than the King's whole realm,
And that she gave this wine unto a beggar
Who gulleted it down like common stuff?

MOSES. It is not true, thank God!
ART. (*to* JEHU). Well—but you said it!
JEHU. Because I felt it was a brave thing for her,
And such is told of the Egyptian Woman.
MOSES. Be off with you!
ART. (*pointing to the roses which* JEHU *carries*). Real roses! Why they're cheap.
Among our folk we've silvern ones and golden.
These should be sent to other lands where flowers
Are costly—rare as gold and silver here.

[*The servants scatter. The guests, among them* SOEMUS, *have been assembling during the latter half of this scene. Music and dancing.* SILO *and* JUDAS *detach themselves from the others and advance to the foreground.*

SILO. What does this mean?
JUDAS. You ask what does this mean?
The King is coming back, and that to-day.
SILO. You think so?
JUDAS. Can you ask? Could there well be
Another ground than this for such a feast?
Go, practise some new-fangled bob o' the back!
SILO. Yet it was said that——
JUDAS. Sham and Flam, as ever,
If it were said some evil overtook him,
But quite in order, since there's many a one
That wishes him this evil. Do men dance
In houses where there's wailing for the dead?
SILO. Then soon there'll be a deal of blood set pouring—
The dungeons since the outbreak are cram full.
JUDAS. I know that better than you e'er could know't;
I've dragged them in; full many a one, myself.
For 'twas so crass, this outbreak, so wrong-headed,
That every man who did not bend his thoughts
To hang himself was bound to stem its current.
You know I have no heartfelt love for Herod
However low I set my back a-bobbing—
But he has right in this—the Romans are
Too mighty for our strength, we are no more

Than a mere insect in the lion's gullet.
It cannot sting him, for it's gulped and gone.

SILO. I'm only sorry for my gardener's son
Who threw a stone against the Roman Eagle
And had the ill success to hit his mark.

JUDAS. How old is he?

SILO. Let's see! How long is it
From when I broke my foot? He was born then.
I know it since his mother could not nurse me.
Yes, that's right! Twenty!

JUDAS. Then he suffers naught.

[MARIAMNE *and* ALEXANDRA *appear.*

The Queen! [*Is about to go.*

SILO. What do you mean by that? A word more!

JUDAS. Good; but between ourselves! Because he's twenty
He suffers naught. But if he were nineteen
Or one-and-twenty 'twould befall him ill.
Next year the case is altered.

SILO. Cease your jest!

JUDAS. I tell you it is thus, and if you'll know
The why, because the King's self has a son
Of twenty years, and yet he knows him not.
The mother took the child when he forsook her
By stealth away and swore a solemn oath
She would corrupt it——

SILO. Oh, the hideous woman!
A heathen!

JUDAS. Likely so; but I know not—
Corrupt it so that he'd be forced to kill it.
But to my mind it was a frenzy-freak
That spumed away with the first foaming rage;
But still it pricks his peace, and no death-sentence
Has ever been fulfilled on any person
Whose years have tallied with his own son's age.
Comfort your gardener, but—between ourselves!

[*They disappear among the others.*

Scene 5

Mariamne, Alexandra, *who appear in the foreground.*

Alex. And so you'll not take refuge with the Romans?
Mar. With what intent?
Alex. Why, to have life in safety.
Mar. Life? Surely so. One must have that in safety,
For Pain would have no sting if robbed of that.
Alex. Then give at least the hour its meed of right.
You give a feast; then show to all your friends
A face all festal-fair as is but meet.
Mar. I am no pipe to play on and no candle,
Not made for sounding and not made for lighting.
Then take me as I am. No, do it not!
Drive me to have my own neck's cleaver whetted—
What idle words! Drive me to share your joyance.
Soemus, come!
[Salome *enters and advances towards her.*

Scene 6

The Same. Salome. *Afterwards*, Soemus.

Mariamne (*to* Salome). Salome, you? Be welcome
Above all others, 'spite your mourning-garments.
This I could scarce have hoped.
Salome. Indeed I must
If I will learn how matters stand. I have been
Invited to a feast, and yet they say
No word of why the feast is being given.
True, I can guess it, but I must have knowledge.
Herod returns, of course, and we shall see him
This very day. The candles answer "yes,"
The music's merry din; do you too say it!
I ask not for my own sake, but you know—
Nay, nay, you know it not, you have forgotten,
Perhaps you've had a dream that she is buried,
Else had you not concealed from her the news.
Ah but your dream was tricksy, for she sits

Ever in the old corner where she sat
When once she blessed you——
MAR. What is this you say?
SALOME. Enough, enough! Herod still has a mother
Who trembles for her son and pines away.
And I, I beg you, let her criminal misdeed
In bearing me prolong no more it's penance;
Give the relief for which her old heart yearns.
MAR. To mother of his I cannot give relief.
SALOME. Are you not then to-day expecting Herod?
MAR. Him least of all. I heard that he is dead.
SALOME. And celebrate this feast?
MAR. Since I'm still living!
And should not one be glad that one still lives?
SALOME. I'll not believe you!
MAR. For this doubt much thanks!
SALOME. The candles——
MAR. Do they not stand there for light?
SALOME. The cymbals——
MAR. Are for ringing—what end else?
SALOME (*pointing to* MARIAMNE'S *rich attire*). The precious stones——
MAR. Of course would suit you better.
SALOME. All this would indicate——
MAR. A joyous feast.
SALOME. And one that on a grave——
MAR. 'Tis possible.
SALOME. Then, Mariamne, hear my earnest word!
I ever hated you, but there was left me
A clinging doubt if I were right therein
And oft with rue in heart I've come anear you
To——
MAR. Give me kisses! Once indeed you did it!
SALOME. But now I see that you are——
MAR. Bad enough
To let you stand while I depart to join
With yonder throng that now begins the dance.
Soemus!

[SOEMUS *advances and gives* MARIAMNE *his arm.*

SOEMUS. Queen!
MAR. 'Twas just in this attire,
Ay just, that Herod saw me when he gave
The bloody order to you. Wonderful!
It all has happened, yes, in just this fashion.
(*As she leaves, to* SALOME.) But you'll look on?
[*Is led by* SOEMUS *to the background, where both are now no longer seen.*
SALOME. This woman's still more wicked
Than I had ever thought, and that says much!
Therefore she has the gay-hued serpent-skin
With which she lures each victim—yes, she dances!
Then now at least I have a peaceful conscience;
On her no soul on earth could work a wrong.
[*She watches* MARIAMNE. *Enter* ALEXANDRA *and* TITUS.

SCENE 7

SALOME. ALEXANDRA. TITUS. *Afterwards,* MARIAMNE.

ALEX. Titus, you notice how my daughter's mourning.
TITUS. 'Twould seem she has some new despatch from Herod.
ALEX. Despatch that all is over with him, yes!
TITUS (*watching* MARIAMNE). She dances!
ALEX. Less like widow than like bride!
Titus, until to-day she's worn a mask,
And mark you this, not she alone has done't.
TITUS. Well for her! She'll not change from what she is,
For if she ranks her with the foes of Herod
She will not share the pangs his friends must suffer.
ALEX. And to prove that she gives, you see, this feast.
[*Moves away from* TITUS.
TITUS. Oh what a shudder takes me at these women!
One, plotting at a hero, whom she first
With hoodwink-kisses lulled to lying peace,
Hews off his head in sleep; the other dances,
Merely to keep firm hands upon the crown,
Like one possessed upon her husband's grave.

And sure I was invited this to see.
[*Watches* MARIAMNE *again.*
Yes, yes, I see't. In Rome she'll have my witness!
But here I drink no single drop of wine.
SALOME. What say you, Titus? Stands it with the King
In such ill plight that she may now dare all?
TITUS. If he's not straightway given Octavian
His turncoat loyalty and helped to deal
The home-thrust ere his fall at Antony,
And that I must misdoubt, it stands not well.
SALOME. Oh, if he had but done it! If her head
Be kept to her, I know not why the Lord
Gave o'er the blood of hot-eyed Jezebel
For dogs to lick. [*She is lost among the others.*
TITUS. She dances still, and yet
Seems forced in mien and mood. She should be glowing
And yet is blanched as though, enchained in musing,
She did some other thing, and sleepy-willed
Followed the dancing. Then it seems this Judith
Brought not her work unanguished to the full.
Ay, and the last kiss given by her husband,
She here and now disowns with pompous show,
Must leave upon her lips the cling of feeling.
She's not yet even seen him dead—She comes!
[MARIAMNE *appears again.* ALEXANDRA *and* SOEMUS *follow her.*
ALEX. (*to* MARIAMNE). I spoke with Titus.
[MARIAMNE *suddenly turns and sees her image in a mirror.*
MAR. Ha!
ALEX. What ails you, then?
MAR. 'Twas thus I saw myself but late in dream—
This was the cause, then, why I could not rest me
Till that lost ruby came again to light
That now casts from my breast such dusky glimmer—
The image had been flaw-marred lacking it!
On this the last treads hot——
ALEX. Come to yourself!
MAR. Nay, let me be! A mirror just like this,

At first with glazy muffle, as o'erbreathed
By living lips; then, like the pictures which
It showed in linked procession, softly clearing
And lastly luminant as polished steel.
I saw my life in sum. First I appeared
As child in light of roses tender-ambient
Of ever redder, ever darker hue.
But then the features, though my own, were strange
And only in the third-changed scene I knew
Myself in such an all too youthful face.
And now there came the Virgin and the moment
When Herod took me to the flowery garden,
Bearing me company, and flattering spoke:—
" There's none so fair she would not need to pluck
The lily of your hand." Ha, be he cursed
That he forgot so full, so full! And then
It all grew eerie, and against my will
I saw the future, saw me thus and thus
And lastly as I stand here. (*To* ALEXANDRA.) Is it then
Not passing strange if dreams step into life?
Again the gleaming mirror overmisted,
The light grew ashen-coloured and myself,
So shortly since a blooming creature, blanched
As though beneath the splendour of this garb
My every vein had long been stilly bleeding.
A shudder gripped me, and I cried " I come now
As skull and bones and that I will not see! "
And then I turned away—

[*She turns away from the mirror.*

VOICES IN THE BACKGROUND. The King! [*General stir.*
ALEX. Who? who?

SCENE 8

THE SAME. HEROD, *in war accoutrement.* JOAB, *and Retinue.*

MARIAMNE. 'Tis Death, Death, Death, has come amongst us,
Without announcement, as he ever comes!

SALOME. Ay, Death for you in truth! You feel't yourself?
My brother!
[*Offers to embrace* HEROD; *he thrusts her back.*
HEROD. Mariamne!
MAR. (*repulsing him with a violent gesture*). Draw the sword!
Give me the poison-goblet! You are Death,
Death gives embrace and kiss with sword and poison!
HEROD (*turning round to* SALOME). And what means this?
A thousand candles called
From distant regions through the night to me—
"Your courier did not fall in Arab hands
A captive. He arrived; you are awaited!"
And now——
SALOME. The candles lyingly deceived you,
The jubilation here was for your death!
Your courier arrived not, and your mother
Has rent her raiment over you.
[HEROD *looks round about; sees* TITUS *and beckons to him.*
TITUS (*advancing*). It is so.
No single soul here could have thought, myself
The least of all, that you before the fight
At Actium would turn from Antony
And, as I grant, at prudence' call give Caesar
Transferred allegiance. But that you have done it
Is proved by your returning here. Then good.
My—gratulations.
MAR. (*approaching him*). And my deep regrets
That no occasion offered you the chance
To slay Mark Antony with your own hand.
'Twas this way you would show your new Lord best
You had no further dealings with the old one.
You would have brought your own friend's head to him,
He would have recompensed you with the crown.
HEROD. Pooh, Titus, pooh! Even you think thus of me?

I made my southward march to Araby
Pursuing orders Antony had given.
But there I found no foe, so I made ready
To start for Actium, and there's no blame
Attaints me if I came too late. Had he
Maintained the attitude I thought he would,
In such a case (*to* MARIAMNE) occasion had been sought
To make him present of Octavian's head
As payment for the crown. (*To* TITUS.) He did it not.
He was long dead ere I appeared, nor was there
A further need for friend, and I set out
To see Octavian, not indeed as King—
I laid the crown aside—but all the more
For that, no beggar. Drawing sword I spoke:—
" This I'd have used against you, and perchance
I would have dyed it with your very blood
If things here had gone better. That is o'er.
I sink it at your feet and lay it by.
Weigh then in mind the sort of friend I was
And not whose friend. The Dead has set me free
And now, if so you will, I can be yours."

TITUS. And he?

HEROD. He said:—" Where have you placed your crown?
I'll set another noble stone therein.
Receive the province which till now has lacked you,
This only shall my largess make you feel,
That I am victor, not Mark Antony.
From Cleopatra it had ne'er been taken,
What she till now possessed I give to you."

TITUS. That—I had ne'er conceived, nor praise I aught
Except your star.

HEROD. O Titus, praise it not!
I have been spared for a harsh work. Soemus!
[SOEMUS *remains standing where he is and does not answer.*
What, recreant? You are dumb! I know enough.
Oh oh, away with him!

SOEMUS (*as he is led off*). Naught I deny,
But that I deemed you dead—you may believe it.
And now I do your will. [*Exit.*

HEROD. And after death
The end of all, eh, friend? Yes, yes, my Titus,
Had you but known the man as I, you never
Would stand there so composed, so unperturbed
As I stand here; you would be foaming, gnashing,
And raving. (*To* MARIAMNE.) Woman, what were you about
To lure so good a man so far? Salome,
So you were right! I must be washing, washing—
Blood here! I institute an inquisition!
You're silent? Case you still in haughty challenge?
And I know why. You have not yet forgotten
What once you were to me. I'd rip more lightly
E'en now heart out of breast—Titus, it is so—
Than (*again to* MARIAMNE) you from out my heart.
And yet I do it.

MAR. (*turning round abruptly*). I am your prisoner?

HEROD. Yes.

MAR. (*to the soldiers*). Then lead me hence.
[*Turns round. At a signal from* HEROD, JOAB *follows her with soldiers.*
Death cannot be my husband any more. [*Exit.*

HEROD. Ha ha! To her in time past I had spoken:—
"Two souls that love each other as they should love
Could never bear each other to outlive.
If I on some far battlefield had fallen
You would not need a courier's announcing,
You'd feel that on the instant death had happened
And woundless die in sentience of mine."
Titus, bemock me not. 'Tis so, 'tis so,
But, ah the pity, mankind loves not thus. [*Exit.*

ACT V

SCENE I

Castle on Zion. A large Audience-Chamber, as in Act I. Throne and tribunal.

HEROD. SALOME.

HEROD. An end, an end to this! The Inquisition
I've ordered and will execute its sentence.
I, I whom once each fever set a-shaking
E'en though her maid-in-waiting it befel,
'Tis I myself that weapons death against her.
Be that enough! and if your zeal not yet
Allow you rest, it will o'ershoot its target.
I shall be thinking that 'tis hate alone
Speaks from your mouth, and you will meet as witness
Rejection, though I shall admit as such
Each several candle that has cast its flame,
Each several flower that has shed its scent.

SALOME. Herod, I'll not deny the truth. I have
Ere now spied on her faults and painted them
With heightened hue as you enhanced the virtues
That you discovered in her. Was the pride
Flaunted upon your mother and me whenever
She crossed our path, was this a ground for love?
As being of a loftier race she bore her
That never had awaked another thought
Within my mind than this—" Wherefore exists
The bulky book that tells the hero-deeds
The Maccabeans wrought unto our folk?
She bears the chronicle upon her face."

HEROD. Your will is to refute me, and you seal
The sentence I have passed.

SALOME. Nay, hear me out!
'Twas so, I'll not deny it. But if now
I've said more than I know and think and feel,

Yea, if I am not moved by sister's pity
To lock the half of what I could have told you
Even now within my breast, then may my child—
You'll grant I love it well—as many years
Live out as hairs are counted on his skull
And every day as much of sorrow bring him
As it shall have of minutes, yea, of seconds.

HEROD. A fearsome oath!

SALOME. And yet it falls from me
More lightly than this word—" The night is black."
E'en though the eye were jaundiced, 'tis past credence
That jaundiced eye were paired by jaundiced ear,
Yea, and by instinct, heart, and every manner
Of organ that is buttress to the senses.
And this time all are tuned so fine together
That they could never clash in contradiction,
Yea, and had God upon that festal night
Called unto me from out the heights of Heaven,
" Say from what evil I shall give your earth
Deliverance—you have the choice! " I would not
Have named the pest, nay, but your wicked wife.
I shuddered at her; she would taint my mood
As though I'd reached a demon out of Hell
Amid the pitchy black by human hand
And he had met me with derision, stepping
Before me in his proper shape of fright
From out the stolen frame of flesh and blood
And grinned and mowed at me through twisting flames.
Nor did I shudder thus alone. The Roman,
Yea, even the ironside Titus felt recoil.

HEROD. True, true, and he weighs heavier than yourself,
For just as he loves no one, he hates no one,
And just he is like ghosts devoid of blood.
Now leave me, for I am awaiting him.

SALOME. I vow this dance shall never be forgotten
In which, responsive to the music's beat,
She trod the floor as though she knew for sure
That you lay underneath. By God, I would

I were not forced to say it, for I know
How inly you, who gave her mother, sister,
And what not for her victims, must rebel.
And yet it was so. ⌜*Exit.*

SCENE 2

HEROD *alone.*

HEROD. Titus said to me
The very same. Myself I saw enough,
And she is right. I gave to her a sister,
A mother almost, for her victims. Would they
Not counterpoise the brother whom she lost?
In her eyes they do not. [*Enter* TITUS.

SCENE 3

HEROD. TITUS.

HEROD. Well, Titus, well?
Admits Soemus——?
TITUS. What you know. Not more.
HEROD. Naught of——?
TITUS. Oh no! He leapt to feet as raving
If I but cast the lightest hint thereat.
HEROD. I could expect it.
TITUS. "Never could," he answered,
"A wife like yours have lived, and never was
A man so little worth the precious jewel
That God vouchsafed to him——"
HEROD. As I myself!
Yes, yes! "He did not know the worth of pearls
Wherefore I took them from him," said the thief.
I know not if that helped.
TITUS. "Her heart was nobler
Than gold."
HEROD. And so he knows it! Swimming-brained
He lauds the wine. Does not that furnish proof
That he has drunk.[1] And what veneer used he

[1] *See* note 14, p. 182.

To coat it? Why betrayed he my commission
To her?

TITUS. From loathing, as he said.

HEROD. From loathing?
And he ne'er gave the loathing words to me?

TITUS. Would not the event have been his bane? Could you
Have granted life unto the stockish servant
If once he had received from you command
And pushed it from him?

HEROD. Why, in such a case,
Was't not enough to leave it unfruitioned?

TITUS. Yes; but if he went further he has done it
Perchance because he deemed you as one lost
And now was fain to have the Queen's good grace
A bargain at your cost for his own profit,
Since it was in her hands his future lay.

HEROD. No, Titus, no! Soemus was the man
To risk the daring bid in his own person
That makes another's grace a needless prop.
For that sole cause I gave it him. I thought:—
" 'Tis done for self if 'tis not done for you."
Yes, had he been a lesser than he is
And had he not in Rome friends in such plenty
I could have thought it true. But now—no, no,
There was one only ground.

TITUS. And yet he'll not
Confess that one.

HEROD. He were not what he is
If he should do it, for he knows full well
What follows that, and hopes now through his lying
To waken in my breast one last misdoubting
Such as will guard, if not perchance his head,
Then hers before the coming bulk of death.
He errs, though. That misdoubting lacks its sting.
Had I no cause to punish what she did
I'd punish that which she became and is.
Ha, had she ever been what she has seemed
She never could have donned this shifting slough
And I'll take vengeance on the duplex Thing.

Yes, Titus, yes, I swear it by the key
Of Paradise that she holds in her hands,
By all beatitude that she erewhile
Has granted me, that she can grant me still,
Yea, by this instant's shudder which monitions
That I in her will blot myself to nothing,
I make an end howe'er the matter stand.

TITUS. It is too late to make the cry of warning
" Give not the order! " and I know myself
No means of leading this to issue clear
And therefore cannot dare to say " Hold! Hold! "
[*Enter* JOAB.

SCENE 4

THE SAME. JOAB.

HEROD (*to* JOAB). Are they assembled?

JOAB. Long since. From the prison
I must announce to you what seems of weight.
We cannot bring this Sameas to such lengths
That he'll disbody soul.

HEROD. I gave command
He should be put to torture till he do it.
(*To* TITUS.) This man had sworn, I've heard, that he would kill him
Could he not make me in his own sweet likeness,
Which process is to break what he has named
The heathenish notions in me. Since he's failed
I now use force on him his oath to keep,
His death's a right good thousandfold deserved.

TITUS. I had myself been urgent for his death,
For me he has reviled and Rome in me
And that can everywhere be granted pardon
But here among this stubborn-stomached folk.

HEROD (*to* JOAB). Well then?

JOAB. Your words were followed to the letter,
But it has helped to no success. The headsman
Plied him with almost every pang, and more,
Grimmed into spite by such unwincing front,
Which he misread as scorn, he dealt him wounds.

But 'tis as though he'd given a tree a flogging,
As though 'twere nerveless wood that took his slashing.
There stands the old man dead to feel of pain,
He sings, instead of shrieking out, and clutching
To get the knife that's held before his eyes,
He sings the psalm which the Three Men of yore
Sang in the fiery oven, and he lifts
At every added pang his voice the louder,
And when he bates it prophesies forsooth!

HEROD (*aside*). Such is their breed. Yes—will they e'er be other?

JOAB. Then he cries out as though for things of wonder
Beyond the threshold he had got an eye
For every wound that he can count. "Now is
The time fulfilled and in the manger-crib
The Virgin-Mother of the stem of David
E'en at this hallowed moment lays a Child
Destined to topple thrones, awake the dead,
Tear stars from heaven and from eternity
Unto eternity o'erlord the world."
Meanwhile the folk in thousands are assembled,
Hang on the very doors and hear it all,
Believing that Elijah's flaming chariot
Will sink to earth and bear him like the prophet
On skyward path. The headsman's menial even
Shrank back and did not cut him with new wounds,
But held the old together.

HEROD. Then he shall
Be killed upon the spot and to the folk
Be shown when he is dead. Thereafter bid
The Judges to present them and——

JOAB. The Queen! [*Exit.*

HEROD. You, Titus, shall be seated at my side.
I send her mother too an invitation
That she at least fail not her child as witness.

[*Enter* AARON, *and the other* FIVE JUDGES. ALEXANDRA *and* SALOME *follow.* JOAB *appears immediately after.*

Scene 5

THE SAME. AARON. THE FIVE JUDGES. ALEXANDRA. SALOME. *Afterwards*, MARIAMNE.

ALEX. My King and Lord, I give you lowly greeting.
HEROD. My thanks to you.
[*He seats himself on the throne.* TITUS *places himself at his side. Then* THE JUDGES *seat themselves at a signal in a semicircle round the tribunal.*
ALEX. (*while this is being done*). The fate of Mariamne
I sunder from my own, and save myself,
Like to a torch, to break in future blaze.
[*She sits next to* SALOME.
HEROD (*to* THE JUDGES). You know why I have had you summoned here.
AARON. In deepest pain do we appear before you.
HEROD. I do not doubt it. With my house and me
You're closely bonded all as friend and kin;
What hurts me must hurt you. You will rejoice,
Touching the Queen, if you—(*stops short*) forgive me that!
You will rejoice if you should not condemn her,
If you may send her, cleared before her spouse,
Again unto my house, not Golgotha,
Yet will you not, faced with the uttermost,
Quake marrowless at its necessity.
Since luck and evil luck with me you share
You share my shame and honour alike with me.
Then to your duty!
[*He gives* JOAB *a sign.* JOAB *goes out and appears again with* MARIAMNE. *A long pause.*
HEROD. Aaron!
AARON. Queen, we have
A heavy task. You stand before your judges.
MAR. Before my judges, yes. Before you too.

AARON. Do you repudiate this court?
MAR. I see
A higher here. If that allow your questions
The answering word from me, then I shall speak,
And hold my peace if such the same forbid.
I scarcely see you clear, for there behind you
Stand ghosts that gaze augustly, dumb, and earnest;
They are the great Forefathers of my stem.
Three nights I saw them ere this hour in dream,
Now too they come by day to me, and well
I know what it must mean when thus assembled
The Dead already ope for me their ranks
And when what lives and breathes for me is pale.
See there behind yon throne on which a king
In seeming sits, stands Judas Maccabaeus—
Hero of Heroes, look thou not so darkly
Upon me from on high! Thou shalt be glad of me!
ALEX. Curb your defiance, Mariamne!
MAR. Mother!
Farewell! (*To* AARON.) Say wherefore I am here accused.
AARON. The accusation's this—your King and Lord
You have deceived. (*To* HEROD.) 'Tis so?
MAR. Deceived? Ah, folly!
Did he not find me in the way he thought
That he would find me, at the dance and play?
And did I don, when I had heard the death-news,
My mourning-raiment? Did I shed my tears?
And did I tear dishevelled locks? Then had I
Deceived him; but these things I have not done,
And can bring solid proof. Salome, speak!
HEROD. I found her as she says. She does not need
To look about for other witnesses.
But I had never, never had such thought.
MAR. Ne'er had such thought? Yet feigned and had the headsman
Set close upon my back? That cannot be.
As I at parting stood before his spirit
E'en so at our reunion he has found me.
Therefore I must deny that I deceived.

HEROD (*breaking into wild laughter*). Nay, she has not deceived because there's naught
She did but what foreshadowing Sentience,
All praise to her, dusked warning Deity,
Caused me to feel. (*To* MARIAMNE.) Woman, this fits you well!
But build not overfast on this, that I
With peace and happiness have lost my strength;
Perchance some jot has still survived for vengeance
And—e'en as boy I ever sent a bird
A chasing dart if it outflew my range.

MAR. Speak not of sentience foreshadowing, speak
Of fear alone. You trembled at the thing
That you deserved. It is the way of man.
You can no longer trust the sister, since you
Have done to death the brother; all that's grossest
Your sullying mind imputes and thinks that I
Must give response, yea, and out-Herod you.
Speak truth, or did you always, when you marched
In honourable open war to death,
Set headsmen close behind my back? You're silent.
Good then! Since you're so deeply sensitive
On what in me is seemly; since your fear
Schoolmasters me on duty, then will I
Now at long last fulfil this holy duty.
Therefore I sunder me from you for aye.

HEROD. Answer! Do you confess or not confess?
[MARIAMNE *is silent.*
(*To the* JUDGES.) You see that all confession fails. Also
I've not the proofs as such that you will need.
But on a murderer once I saw you pass
The doom of death because the slain man's jewel
Was found on him. It was no help that he
Had pointed to his cleanly-washen hands,
And none too that he swore the dead man gave it
As gift. You had the sentence executed.
Good then! It stands thus here. She has the jewel
That proves to me more undeniably

Than ever any tongue of man could do it
She shamed me with the abhorred of all abhorred.
A miracle must not alone have happened.
It must in other case have been repeated,
And miracles were ne'er repeated yet.[1]
[MARIAMNE *makes a gesture.*
'Tis true she'll speak just as the murderer spoke—
" 'Twas given her for a gift!" And she may dare it
Because a chamber, like a wood, is dumb.
But were you tempted thus to give her credit
Then I will set in scale my inmost feeling
And probing of each possibility
As counterbalance, and demand her death,—
Her death, I say! no more this nauseous goblet
I'll empty which her proud defiance fills,
Nor day on day be gadflied with the riddle
If such a pride's the most repellent face
Of Innocence, or the most brazen mask
Of Sin. I'll rescue me from out this whirlpool
Boiling with hate and love ere I be choked,
And be the cost as high as e'er it may.
Therefore away with her! You dally still?
It's settled! What? I missed the telling point?
Then speak! I know that silence is my part,
But speak! speak! Sit not there like Solomon
Between the mothers with the pair of children.
Her case is clear; you need no more for sentence
Than what you see! A woman that stands there
As she does, earns her death though she were clean
Of every guilt. And still you never speak?
Will you perchance first have the proof how fast
Is my conviction that she has deceived?
Such I will give you through Soemus' head
And that at once. [*He goes up to* JOAB.

TITUS (*rising*). I say this is not trial.
Your pardon! [*Is about to go.*

MAR. Roman, stay! I recognise it,
Who can repudiate it if not I?
[TITUS *seats himself again.* ALEXANDRA *rises.*

[1] *See* note 15, p. 184.

MAR. (*approaching her, and in a subdued voice*). You've
wrought on me much harm and never has
Your meed of happiness by mine been measured.
If I'm to pardon that, be silent now.
You alter naught; my will is firm and fixed.
[ALEXANDRA *seats herself again.*
And now, my Judges?
AARON (*to the other* JUDGES). Let that man rise up
Who deems the sentence of the King unjust!
[*All remain seated.*
You therefore all resolve yourselves for death?
(*Rising.*) Queen, you are here condemned to suffer
death.
Have you aught still to answer?
MAR. If the headsman
Is not bespoke already and by now
Awaits me with his axe, then I would crave
A final word with Titus ere my death.
(*To* HEROD.) It is not wont to give the last request
Of dying men refusal. Can you grant it,
Then let my life be added unto yours.
HEROD. The Headsman is not yet bespoke. I can.
And since you promise me eternity
As my reward, I must, and more, I will.
(*To* TITUS.) This woman is an awesome thing!
TITUS. She stands
Before a man as never woman should;
Make then an end.
SALOME (*advancing*). Oh do it! For your mother
Is sick unto the death. She will be whole
If spared to see it.
HEROD (*to* ALEXANDRA). Did you not say aught?
ALEX. No.
[HEROD *gazes long at* MARIAMNE. MARIAMNE
remains dumb.
HEROD. Die! (*To* JOAB.) I lay it in your hands.
[*Goes off quickly.* SALOME *follows him.*
ALEX. (*looking after* HEROD). I have
An arrow still for you. (*To* MARIAMNE.) You
wished it so!

MAR. I thank you. [*Exit* ALEXANDRA.
AARON (*to the other* JUDGES). Can we not even now attempt
To soften him? This fills me o'er with horror.
She is the last of Maccabean daughters.
If we could only gain the briefest respite!
Now 'twere not feasible that we withstood him.
Soon will he be his former self again
And then it's possible he'll punish us
Because to-day we made him no resistance.
Follow him! [*Exit.*
JOAB (*approaching* MARIAMNE). You forgive? I must obey.
MAR. Do what your Lord commands and do it swift.
I shall be ready soon as you yourself,
And queens, you know, are never wont to wait.
[*Exit* JOAB.

SCENE 6

MARIAMNE. TITUS. *Afterwards,* JOAB.

MARIAMNE. (*approaching* TITUS). Yet one more word before I sleep, the while
My latest chamberlain prepares my bed.
I see you are astounded that this word
Directs itself on you and not my mother,
But she is far and foreign to my heart.
TITUS. Astounded that the woman thus should teach me
How hearted I, the man, should meet my death.
Yes, Queen, it prickles sense, this thing you've done,
Nor less, I hide it not, your Being's self;
Yet, this despite, the hero-soul I honour
Which lets you take your leave of life as though
You left this fair world at your journey's end
No longer worth a fleeting backward glance.
And this brave mood half reconciles me to you.
MAR. 'Tis no brave mood.
TITUS. I' faith I have been told
Your black-look Pharisees give out the notion

That death is but the proper birth of life.
And who believes them sets the world at nothing
In which the sun alone gives light eternal
And all beside is puffed into the night.

MAR. I ne'er would hear them and believe it not.
Nay, nay, I know from what I am to part.

TITUS. Then you stand thus as scarce could Caesar's self
When Brutus' hand had dealt the dagger-thrust.
For he, too proud to bare his pain of heart
And yet not strong enough to choke it under,
In falling covered up his countenance.
But you can hold it back within your breast.

MAR. No more, no more! It is not as you think.
I feel no longer pain of heart, for pain
Demands the nerve of life, and life in me
Is a quenched fire. I long have been no more
Than middle thing between the Man and Shadow
And scarcely grasp the thought I still can die.
Hear now a thing I will confide in you,
But first give oath to me as man and Roman
That you'll be dumb till I am under earth,
And that you bear me escort when I go.
You hesitate? I ask too much of you?
My slip to sin is not the cause, and if
You later speak or if you hold your peace
Decide yourself; I'll bind you not in aught,
And more, I hold that wish of mine in check
Since you have ever, like a bronzen god
Above a brawl of fire, self-mastered, cold,
Cast the strong fretless eye upon our hell.
You may command belief in giving witness.
We are for you a race of other breed
No bond can knit to you; you speak of us
As we would speak of foreign plants and stones,
Impartial, void of love and void of hate.

TITUS. You go too far.

MAR. If you refuse me now
Your overstubborn word, I take my secret
With me into the grave; my latest solace

I then must lack this—that one human breast
Will keep mine image pure and undefiled,
Which then when Fate has dared its ugliest
Can lift the veil that shrouds it from the feel
Of duty and of reverence for the truth.

TITUS. Good. I will swear the oath to you.

MAR. Then know
I put deceit on Herod, but 'twas other,
Far other than he weens; nay, I was true
As he to self. Why shame me thus—much truer,
For he has long been other than he was.
What, am I to protest it? Sooner far
I were resolved to swear an oath I have
My eyes and hands and feet. Them I would lose
And I would still remain that which I am;
But not my heart and soul.

TITUS. I do believe you
And I will——

MAR. Keep the promise you have made.
I doubt it not. Now ask yourself my feeling
When for the second time (for once already
I'd pardoned him) he put me under sword
And I must say to me:—"Your shadow's liker
Your proper self than that wry twisted image
He bears of you far in his inmost depths."
'Twas that I would not bear, and could I so?
I made to grasp my dagger, and prevented
From rash-essayed self-murder, I then swore—
"It is your will in death to be my headsman?
You shall become my headsman, but in life.
The woman you have gazed on you shall slaughter
And not till death shall see me as I am;"
You came unto my feast; well then, a mask
Was dancing there.

TITUS. Ha!

MAR. 'Twas a mask that stood
To-day before the Judges; for a mask
The axe is whetted, but it strikes myself.

TITUS. I stand dumbfounded, Queen, and yet I charge you

With no injustice when perforce I say
That you had duped my very self, had filled me
With horror and recoil before your feast
As now with shudders and admiring wonder.
If thus with me, how could this show for him
Have failed to dim your Being in a darkness,
For him, whose heart all passion-fluctuous
As little as a turbid-troubled stream
Could image things reflected as they are.
Therefore I give his hurt my answering feel
And find that your revenge is overstern.

MAR. But that revenge I take at my own cost;
And proof it was not for the sake of life
That death like any altar-beast incensed me
I give you, for I cast that life away.

TITUS. Give me my word again!

MAR. And if you broke it
You'd alter not a tittle; for to die,
There man commands his fellow, but to live,
In that the mightiest forces not the weakest.
And I'm aweary! Yea, I envy now
The stone, and if the end of life is this
That man should learn to hate it and to death,
Eternal death, give preference, it is
Achieved in me. And may they quarry granite,
Uncrumbling rock, to hollow out my coffin,
May it be sunken in abysmal ocean
That so my dust escape the elements
Oblivioned for all eternity.

TITUS. And yet we all live in the world of show.

MAR. I see that now and therefore I go out.

TITUS. I have myself against you testified.

MAR. To gain that end I had you at the feast.

TITUS. Should I say to him what to me you've said—

MAR. Then he would call me back, I doubt it not.
And if I followed, this were my reward,
That now before each one that comes anear me
Henceforward I must shudder and inly say—
"Take care, for this perchance is your third headsman!"

No, Titus, no, I played no pettish game;
For me there's no return; if such there were
Think you I had not found it out when I
Took everlasting farewell from my children?
Naught but defiance drove me, as he thinks;
If so my guiltless smart had broke defiance
And now 'twould only mean a bitterer death.

TITUS. Oh, if he felt that, came himself and flung him
Down at your feet!

MAR. Yes, then indeed he had
The Demon overmastered, and I could
Say all to him. For it is not my part
To chaffer with him meanly for a life
That through the price alone at which 'tis bought
Must lose for me the paltriest patch of worth.
It were my part, to crown him for self-conquest
And, oh believe, I could!

TITUS. Have you no boding,
O Herod?

[JOAB *enters noiselessly and remains standing in silence.*

MAR. No! You see, he sends me—him! (*pointing to* JOAB.)

TITUS. Let me——

MAR. Have you not understood me, Titus?
And in your eyes is still the cause defiance
That put my mouth in lock? Can I still live?
Can I still live with him, the man who now
In me God's image venerates no more?
And if by keeping silence I had power
To necromance old Death and give him weapons
Were it my duty then to break my silence
Only to change one dagger for the other?
And were it more to do so?

TITUS. She is right.

MAR. (*to* JOAB). Are you prepared? [JOAB *bows.*
(*Turning towards* HEROD'S *apartments.*) Then,
Herod, fare you well!
(*To Earth.*) Thou, Aristobulus, oh receive my
greeting!

Soon I am with thee in eternal night.

[*She moves towards the door.* JOAB *opens it. Armed men are seen who form their ranks in homage. She goes out.* TITUS *follows her.* JOAB *joins them. Solemn pause.*

SCENE 7

SALOME *alone.*

SALOME. She's gone! And yet I feel no throb of heart,
A further sign that she deserves her fate.
And so I have at last my brother back,
My mother also has her son. 'Tis well;
I would not budge from him. Else had the Judges
E'en then his judgment jarred. Nay, Aaron, nay,
No word of prison! She'd remain endungeoned
Not for a moon. The grave alone holds fast,
For to the grave alone he has no key.[1]

[*Enter* A SERVANT.

SCENE 8

SALOME, THE THREE KINGS FROM THE EAST, HEROD, TITUS, JOAB, ALEXANDRA.

SERVANT. Three kings from out the Eastern lands are here,
They are with costly presents richly laden
And at this very moment have arrived.
Never were seen more strangely striking figures
Nor garments of more wondrous kind than these.

SALOME. Conduct them in. [*Exit* SERVANT.
I'll tell him this at once.
So long as they're with him he will not think
On her; and all is over soon with her.

[*She goes after* HEROD.

[*The* SERVANT *conducts in the* THREE KINGS FROM THE EAST. *They are dressed in strange and curious raiment in such a way that*

[1] *See* note 16, p. 184.

they differ from each other in every particular. A rich retinue follows them, of like characteristics. Gold, incense, and myrrh. Enter HEROD, *and* SALOME *shortly after him.*

FIRST KING. O King, all hail!
SECOND KING. A blessing on thy House!
THIRD KING. A benison to all eternity!
HEROD. I thank you. But methinks for such an hour
The salutation's strange.
FIRST KING. Was not a son
Born to you?
HEROD. Me? Oh no! My wife has died.
FIRST KING. We have no call to tarry here.
SECOND KING. So there's
A second King then here?
HEROD. Then there would be
None here at all.
THIRD KING. There's here, beside your own,
A second stem, it seems, of Kingly blood.
HEROD. And why?
FIRST KING. It is so.
SECOND KING. Yes, it must be so.
HEROD. Of that too I know naught.
SALOME (*to* HEROD). In Bethlehem
The stem of David still has left a shoot
Remaining.
THIRD KING. David was a King?
HEROD. 'Tis so.
FIRST KING. Let us now go even unto Bethlehem!
SALOME (*continuing, to* HEROD). But now it plants its seed alone in beggars.
HEROD. I think it, else——
SALOME. I spoke once with a virgin
Of David's house, Mary, I think, her name.
I found her fair enough for such a lineage,
But she was to a carpenter betrothed
And scarcely lifted eyes upon my face
When I made question of her name.
HEROD. You hear it?
SECOND KING. 'Tis naught! We go.

HEROD. You will then, ere you go,
Acquaint me what has brought you hither.
FIRST KING. Reverence
Before the King above all Kings.
SECOND KING. The wish
Ere yet we die to view his countenance.
THIRD KING. The holy duty at His feet in homage
To lay whate'er on earth is costly-rare.
HEROD. Who gave you tidings of Him then?
FIRST KING. His star!
We journeyed not together and we knew
Naught of each other, for our kingdoms lie
To furthest East and furthest West, seas flow
Between them, lofty mountains sunder them——
SECOND KING. And yet it was the self-same star we saw,
The self-same impulse that had seized our hearts;
We wandered on the self-same way and met us
At last together at the self-same goal——
THIRD KING. Whether a King's son or a beggar's son
The Child this star has lighted into life
Will be uplifted high, and on the Earth
No man shall breathe that will not bow to Him.
HEROD (*aside*). So speaks the Ancient Book as well!
(*Aloud.*) May I
Make offer of a guide to Bethlehem?
FIRST KING (*pointing to Heaven*). We have a guide!
HEROD. Then good. And if the Child
Be found, I prithee send to me the tidings
That I with you may do Him reverence.
FIRST KING. It shall be done. Now forth to Bethlehem!
[*The* THREE KINGS *with their retinue leave the stage.*
HEROD. It never will be done!
[*Enter* JOAB *and* TITUS, *followed by* ALEXANDRA.
Ha!
JOAB. It is finished!
[HEROD *covers up his face.*
TITUS. She died, yes, died! But as for me, I have
A still more fearful office to perform

Than he who brought your word of blood to pass,
For I must tell you she was innocent.

HEROD. No, Titus, no! [TITUS *is about to speak.*
(*Stepping close up to him.*) For were that so, you could not
Have let her go to death.

TITUS. No one was able
To hinder that but you. It gives me pain
To be against my will your worse than headsman,
But if a holy duty yields the dead one,
Whoever he may be, the rite of burial,
Still holier is the duty from a shame
To wash him clean if he deserve it not.
This duty now lays law on me alone.

HEROD. I see from all you say one only thing—
Her spell in death itself was true to her.
Why eats Soemus still my heart? How could he
Resist this blinding woman in her life?
Even in the dying flash she kindled you.

TITUS. Goes jealousy the very grave beyond?

HEROD. If I have duped me, if from out your mouth
Some other thing than pity now were speaking
Too deep by far not to be more than such,
Then I must give you warning that your witness
Helped to condemn her, that the duty-bond
For you had then been this—to give me warning
As soon as e'er the tiniest doubt had come.

TITUS. But my word held me back, and, more than that,
The unimplorable Necessity.
Had I relaxed from her one pace, no further,
Upon herself the deathly thrust were given.
I saw the dagger hidden in her breast
And more than once the twitching of her hand.
[*Pause.*
She wished to die; she must have done so, too.
As much she suffered and as much she pardoned
As she had power to pardon and to suffer.
I have beheld her very innermost,
Who more demands should quarrel not with her,

Should quarrel only with the elements
Which, willed or not, had been so mixed in her
That she could go no further. Yes, but let him
Show me a woman further gone than she!
[HEROD *makes a gesture.*
She wished to have her death from you, and called
The unshapen dream-child of your jealousy
Into illusive being at her feast,
Juggling her soul to death and all deceiving.
I found that stern but not unjust. She stepped
As mask before your eyes; the mask was destined
To sting you till you pierced it with a sword-thrust. [*He points to* JOAB.
And that you did and killed her very self.

HEROD. So spoke she, but she spoke from vengeance so.

TITUS. So was it. I have testified against her.
How gladly would I doubt it!

HEROD. And Soemus?

TITUS. Upon the way that leads to death I met him,
He entered on his own as soon as hers
Had been accomplished, and he felt it balm
To think his blood with hers should be commingled
E'en though upon the block by headsman-hand.

HEROD. Aha! You see?

TITUS. And what? Perchance in stillness
He burned for her. But if that were a sin
Then it was his and never aught of hers.
He cried to me:—"I die because I spoke;
Else had I died because I might have spoken.
For such was Joseph's lot. He swore while still
In death that he was innocent as I,
I marked it."

HEROD (*breaking out*). Joseph! Is he too avenged?
Does Earth gape open? Do the striding dead
Outface me all?

ALEX. (*approaching him*). They do! But no, fear nothing.
There's one—a woman—still lies under earth!

HEROD. Accursèd! (*Commanding himself.*) Be it so.
If then Soemus

Committed but a single crime against me,
[*He turns to* SALOME.
Joseph, through whom this vulgar-souled suspicion
Had filled him, Joseph fooled him even in death—
Is it not so?—Why are you silent now?

SALOME. Hot-foot he dogged her every step——

ALEX. (*to* HEROD). Ay true!
But with intent to find the ripened time,
No more, in which to carry out your charge
Both her and me to murder——

HEROD. Is this true?
(*To* SALOME.) And you, you?

ALEX. Almost the self-same hour
Why he allowed his mask fully to fall
Had Mariamne ta'en on her the oath
To give herself, if you returned not hither,
A sacrifice to death. I hide it not.
For doing so I hated her.

HEROD. Oh fearful!
And this—but now you tell this?

ALEX. Yes!

TITUS. I know
This too. It was her latest word to me.
But for a thousand years I had been silent,
I would but clear her name, not give you torture.

HEROD. Then—— (*His voice fails him.*)

TITUS. Calm yourself! It wounds me too.

HEROD. Ay, wounds
You, her (*to* SALOME) and everyone who here, like me,
Has been the blinded tool of slant-souled Fate,
But I alone have lost what on this earth
Eternally will ne'er be seen again.
Have lost! Oh! Oh!

ALEX. Aha, Aristobulus,
You are avenged, my son, and I in you.

HEROD. What, triumphing? You think that I will now
Wilt like a broken thing? Nay, I will not.
I am a king and I will let the world
[*He makes a gesture as though snapping something to pieces.*

Feel it and tremble! Up now, Pharisees.
Up with your rebel heads! (*To* SALOME.) And you, why shrink you
So soon from me? Why, sure, I've not yet altered
My face, but on the morrow it may happen
That my own mother shall be forced to swear
I am no more her son.
[*After a pause, in a toneless voice.*
Ah, if my crown
Were set with all the stars that flame in heaven,
For Mariamne I would give them hence
And, if I had it too, this earthen ball.
Yea, were it possible that I myself
Living as now within the grave could lay me
And ransom her from out her own, I'd do it!
With my own hands I'd dig myself therein.
Ah, but I cannot! Therefore have I still
And fastly hold what still I have. That is
Not much, but still a crown is part thereof
Which now shall fill for me the woman's place,
And who makes grasp for that—One does so now;
Why yes, a Boy does so, a Marvellous Boy—
He Whom the Prophets have long been announcing
And Whom e'en now a star lights into life.
But, Fate, thy reckoning is sore at fault
If thou, in trampling me with iron foot,
A piecemeal thing, hast thought to smooth His course.
A soldier I; myself will fight with thee
And, as I lie, will bite thee in the heel.
(*Sharply.*) Joab! [JOAB *approaches.*
(*In a contained voice.*) You go at once to Bethlehem
And tell the Captain there who's in command
To find the Marvellous Boy—Nay, he will not
Ransack him out, not all can see the star;
As for those Kings, they're sly as sanctimonious—
The children who within the bygone year
Were born, he is to slay upon the spot.
He leaves no single one surviving.
JOAB (*retreating*). Good!

(*Aside.*) And I know why! But Moses was delivered
Pharaoh despite!

HEROD (*still loud and strong*). I'll see to it to-morrow,
To-day with Mariamne—(*He collapses.*) Titus!
[TITUS *catches him.*

APPENDIX

containing passages from the original version and those omitted for stage representation.

1. *At this point was written originally:—*

I've no more use for him; behind the plough
To trapse is 'gainst his stomach; as to music,
For that he's over-restive; then the trumpet,
I tried some blowing-lessons—wasted all!
Fists, ay and fine ones too, are his equipment,
Fear he knows none, not e'en the fear of me.
And since the day you scoured the mountains clean
There's never brigand gives himself to glimpse.
So he's with us a lack-use, and perchance
Will be the first to get a kink in his ways
And spoil our maiden's pleasure in the woods.
If you'll not— (*To his son.*) Now then, Blacklooks, clear your brow!
The word was not ill-meant; and if the King
Forgives the jest, why you can do it too!
So then you'll take him, Sire? Before the gate
I saw the Roman cohort in your service
And thought this raw-hide lad was just their fellow,
In all, I mean, that touches form and fashion,
As though, within the very mother-womb,
He'd had the thought to stop a gap therein.
No single one I saw gave me the notion
He might have had a bent or finger-knack
For sandal-cobbling or for garment-stitching,

But in each mother's son I thought I marked
That straight upon the Captain's uttered word
He'd spit his very sire without a qualm,
—Just what this sprig of mine were ripe to do!
The worser else, for soldiering the better.

2. *Insert:—*

If this lad be not true to me, why then
His mother was no better toward his father.
At least he'll be so for an eight-days' space
For he knows none here. That's a point worth while! [*Exit* JOAB.

3. *In the MS.:—*

Of pearls we spoke our latest word. But pearls
Are white and blood is red. How came I then
From white of pearls upon the red of blood?
'Tis naught; the wearing's sweet, nor long the question
Whether the diver, even to arm and leg,
Paid a forced reckoning to the snatching polyp.
For if his fate be such to go a-seeking
And fight therefore the Things o' the underwaters,
'Tis mine to have them for the necklet-winding
And make myself a mark for every arrow
Winged by wry hearts and hate—worse lot than his!
Who has a head believes him worth a crown,
Who has a neck wants pearls as well thereon.

4. *After this line in the MS.:—*

Believe my word, natures there are in life
That put deceit, and must, on all whose trusting
Is not a wholeheart thing. Not in the testing,
Nay, through the testing's self they topple groundward
Being too high erefor, too fine of feel.
Woe then to you if you've no heart for trusting
Since you—Forgive me! This is the last time.

HEROD. Farewell.

MARIAMNE. Farewell. I know you will come back.

5. *Insert :—*

HEROD (*aside*). I'll do it—ay and must, though doubly sore
It sting me that no more is in my power.

6. *Insert :—*

Ay, and for us as well 'twill serve a turn,
Henceforth through all Judaea 'twill be ours
To fare at night-time and without our torches.
You see the King knows well what he's about.

7. The text runs:—

Es wär' genug den Cäsar zu bezahlen
Und schätzt er selbst sich ab vorm Tode.

The words seem to mean " The tribute would be enough to pay Caesar if he (Herod) were assessing his own value to save himself from death." The passage proved too much for me, and I owe this explanation to Mr. Nicholson. I translate:—

It were enough to quit his debt to Caesar
Were he himself to rate his worth 'gainst death.

8. *Insert :—*

Herod, if it were mine with one mere word
To pluck me from my death, never would I
Seek such abjection as that word to utter;
If I were strong to tell me that my life,
My whole-of-blemish life itself had spoken,
Then would I rather die than let misthought
Of meaner mould by such a word be stifled.
Forget not that!

9. *Insert :—*

That you deny. Now ere the time I know,
If death be overhasty on my footsteps,
What thing will make me quail in my last hour.
I saw, now years agone, a dying man
Upon a field of fight, on whom an insect
Had crept and stung. One twitch he still could give
And straight thereon yielded the final breath.

I felt its horror. For his wounds, I scarce
Set eyes upon them, but the insect-sting
I see even now. And thus 'twill go with me.
That sense-repelling, spirit-sickening thing
Is my last torture. Take my prepaid thanks!

10. *Insert :—*

If it have weight for me, 'twill lie for me
Self-manifest.

11. *Insert :—*

To-night a feast! I'll shape me to the image
That he must bear in heart, deeming it me!
He sees me ever dancing, that is clear,
E'en when I'm weeping and dissolved in anguish.
Dance then I shall!—set on the cymbal's clashing
That at my sight he be not put to blush!

12. *Instead of this speech of* SOEMUS *the MS. has :—*

Then stood I not before you. Then on me
Had fallen his death-hand, as, when he returns,
That death-hand will and must soon as it may.
That lay and lies i' the order. Even as I
Was but his limb, I had alone 'twixt death
And life the simple choice. My bow was forced
And forced the hypocriting—have your word.
Albeit my inmost soul before him froze.

13. *Insert :—*

SOEMUS. He hoodwinked me not for a moment's space.
And all the less for this, that Joseph's death
To me was less a riddle than to all
Who saw him not upon his latest path.
'Twill shock you to recoil—but there was like
Injunction laid on him, and he kept dumb
Lest aught should slip his guard. Thus much at least
I must believe, for in the very dying
He swore he'd naught committed worthy death.

MAR. I know it all—yes!
SOEMUS What?
ALEX. And gave't your pardon?
SOEMUS. And, that despite, extolled him and defended?
Then the mere harboured thought upon your hurt
Was a more heinous thing than the wrought deed
On any woman else!
MAR. Come to my feast! *etc.*

14. *Insert :—*

TITUS. If so be your physician
Gave him assurance that from Africa
You brought a fever, then (so ran his words)
He'd pardon your misthought, but else——
HEROD. So speaks he
Knowing full well the aftermath, and fain
To be her shield before my vengeance. That
I understand. And what veneer, *etc.*

The original version ran thus :—

TITUS. If so be your physician——
HEROD. What were his grounds?
TITUS. The thing you hug so close.
HEROD. And how was that?
TITUS. He gave me half-light hints.
" You laid on him an outrage passing nature
In whose compare to set into a blaze
The Temple even, were none."
HEROD. And, not content
To leave it undischarged, whereby enough
Were expiated the most ticklesome
Of consciences to mollify, he went
Flying to her with my command, and made
His bid—no guess you know it—
TITUS. Naught!
HEROD. He kept
Concealed from you what he laid bare to her?
Oh had he changed his rôle about! Nay, never!
He must have given to you what stood for him

Within her payment. Learn it then from me—
I laid on him—ask me not why—command
Whereby he was to kill her if myself
Should have no home-return. That thus I did
Proves you how deep I trusted him. Believe me
I had good ground therefor, and if the iron,
Whereof the man is mettled, flagged and flowed,
It proves but this, that he was in the fire.

TITUS. Yes, yes, and yet—'tis not what I'd have done.

HEROD. Had she but loved me as I her, then were she
After my death all out of love with life.
What the heart's out of love with lets a man
Begone, nor rues it. No one holds it fast.
What was the point to ponder? Had she not
Tripped me behind my back, she'd gladly die;
Whereas if she did trip me, then were hers
A well-earned death for such a double front.
Then let the friend of twilight blame my step,
The light's my choice, and now I see full clear,
I see what health there is within her heart.
Why fret my soul with this and that? why question
If, after swearing deathless love to me,
In such or such a way she made the breach?
Granted that she were pure, granted Soemus
Made her his head away—I cannot think it
But grant 'twere so—that Joseph did the same,
Was it my cue, before her spite's stiff neck,
To sink my own, and like a milksop let her
Twist her to sheer negation of her soul?
Oh nay, Oh nay! I swear it by the key
Of Paradise that she holds in her hands.
By all beatitude that she erewhile
Has granted me, that she can grant me still,
I lash what she became, not what she did.
You eye me doubtfully, you think I reach
Myself in her. I do it, oh I do it!
If it may hap that men can die of wounds

They give and not receive, then even now
'Twill come to pass—and yet to my content.

15. *Insert :—*

And this is now the second time. Then hear—
By your stark stubbornness, upon an earth
Where all's in flux, the only rigid thing;
By every day of loveliness I lived
With you to share, each day that now no more
I dare remember; by my future, which
Can never bring to me such days again;
Yea, by the very shudder which were fain
E'en now to choke this oath; this day, this hour
I'll have it out, whether my life is one
With life of yours, and if it be that Nature
In mock and gibe enknots me with a creature
For ever—one to whom I'm naught, who can
Avenge her thus, nay stand here as you do!
Away! (*To* THE JUDGES.) You halt? My sentence
will no jot
Admit retraction! (*Seeing they still hesitate.*) Or
have I missed the point?

16. *Insert :—*

Since you are not for me nor yet against.

18 7 4
69
115

MARIA MAGDALENA

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

ANTHONY, *a joiner.*
HIS WIFE.
CLARA, *his Daughter.*
KARL, *his Son.*
LEONARD.
A SECRETARY.
WOLFRAM, *a Merchant.*
ADAM, *a Bailiff.*
SECOND BAILIFF.
BOY.
MAID.

SCENE: A town of moderate size.

MARIA MAGDALENA

ACT I

Room in the master-joiner's house.

SCENE 1

CLARA. *Her* MOTHER.

CLARA. Your wedding-dress? Oh, how well it suits you! It might have been made to-day!

MOTHER. Yes, child, the fashion runs on, till it can't get any further, and has to turn back. This dress has gone out of fashion ten times already, and has always come in again.

CLARA. But not quite, this time, mother. The sleeves are too wide. Don't be cross with me now!

MOTHER (*smiling*). No, I should be *you* if I were!

CLARA. And so that's what you looked like! But surely you wore a garland, too?

MOTHER. I should think so! Why else do you suppose I tended the myrtle-bush in the flower-pot all these years?

CLARA. I've asked you so many times, and you would never put it on. You always said, " It's not my wedding-dress now, it's my shroud, and not to be played with." I began at last to hate the sight of it, hanging all white there, because it made me think of your death and of the day when the old women would pull it over your head. What've you put it on for, to-day, then?

MOTHER. When you're as ill as I've been, and don't know whether you'll get better or not, lots of things go round in your head. Death is more terrible than people think. Death is bitter-hard. He darkens the world, he blows out all the lights, one after another, that gleam

so bright and gay all round us. The dear eyes of husband and children cease to shine, and it grows dim on every side. But death sets a light in the heart, and there it grows clear, and you can see lots—lots that you can't bear to see. . . . I don't know what wrong I've done. I've trodden God's path, and worked in the house as well as I could. I've brought up your brother and you in the fear of the Lord, and eked out what your father earned with the sweat of his brow. And I always managed to have a penny to spare for the poor. If I did turn one away at times because I was cross-tempered, or because there were too many of them, it was no misfortune for him, for I was sure to call him back and give him double. But what's all that worth! We tremble just the same when the last hour threatens. We cringe like worms. We pray to God for our lives, like a servant asking his master to let him do a spoiled job over again, so as not to come short on pay-day.

CLARA. Do stop that, mother dear, it exhausts you.

MOTHER. Child, it does me good. Am I not strong and healthy again? Didn't God simply call me to make me see that my garment was not yet spotless and pure, and didn't He let me turn back at the mouth of the grave, and give me time to adorn myself for the heavenly bridal? He was not as lenient as that to those seven virgins in the Gospel that I made you read to me last night. That's why I've put this dress on to-day, to go to holy communion in. I wore it on the day when I made my best and purest vows. Let it remind me of those I didn't keep.

CLARA. You are talking just as you did in your illness!

SCENE 2

KARL (*enters*). Good-morning, mother. Now, Clara, how would you fancy me, suppose I weren't your brother?

CLARA. A gold chain? Where've you got that?

KARL. What do I toil and sweat for? Why do I

work two hours longer than the others every night? I like your cheek.

MOTHER. Quarrelling on a good Sunday morning? For shame, Karl.

KARL. Mother, haven't you got a couple of shillings for me?

MOTHER. I've only got money for house-keeping.

KARL. Well, give me some of that. I won't grumble if the pancakes are a bit thin for the next fortnight. You've done it many a time before. I know that. When you were saving up for Clara's white dress, there was nothing tasty on the table for months. I closed my eyes to it, but I knew very well that a new hat or some show-piece was on the way. Let me have the benefit of it for a change.

MOTHER. You are impudent.

KARL. Well, I've no time now, or else—— (*going*).

MOTHER. Where are you going?

KARL. I won't tell you. Then you won't need to blush when the old grizzly asks where I've gone. Tell him you don't know. I don't want your money either. It's a good job there's water in more wells than one. (*Aside.*) They always think the worst of me at home, anyway. Why shouldn't I keep them on the tremble, just for fun? Why should I tell them that I shall have to go to church now, unless somebody helps me out?

SCENE 3

CLARA. What does that mean?

MOTHER. Oh, he grieves me to the heart. Yes, your father's right. That's the outcome of it. When he was still a curly-headed boy, he used to ask so sweetly for his piece of sugar, and now he demands money of me just as insolently. I wonder whether he really wouldn't want the money, if I had refused him the sugar. It worries me often. I don't believe he even loves me. Did you ever once see him crying when I was sick?

CLARA. I saw very little of him; scarcely ever, except at meal times. He had a better appetite than I had!

MOTHER (*quickly*). That's natural; his work is hard.

CLARA. Of course. Men are like that, too. They are more ashamed of their tears than of their sins. They don't mind showing a clenched fist, but a weeping eye, no! Father's just the same. The afternoon they opened your vein and no blood came, he was sobbing away at his bench. It went right through me. But when I went up to him and stroked him on the cheek, what do you think he said? "See if you can't get this damned shaving out of my eye. There's so much to do and I'm not getting on with it at all."

MOTHER (*smiling*). Yes, yes.—I never see Leonard now. How is that?

CLARA. Let him stay away.

MOTHER. I hope you don't see him anywhere except at home here.

CLARA. Do I stay too long when I go to the well at night, that you start suspecting me?

MOTHER. I don't say that. But it was only to keep him from hanging about after you at nights in all weathers, that I let him come into the house at all. My mother wouldn't allow that sort of thing, either.

CLARA. I never see him at all.

MOTHER. Have you been sulking with each other? I don't dislike him. He's so steady. If only he *was* somebody! In my time he wouldn't have had to wait long. The gentlefolk used to be as crazy after a good clerk, as a lame man after a crutch, for a good clerk was rare then. He was useful to small people like us, too. One day he would compose a New Year's greeting from son to father, and would get as much for the gold lettering alone as would buy a child a doll. The next day the father would send for him, and have him read it aloud to him, secretly, with the door locked, lest he should be caught unawares, and show his ignorance. That meant double pay. Clerks were top-dog then, and raised the price of beer. But it's different now. We old people, who can neither read nor write, are the laughing-stocks of nine-year-old boys. The world's getting cleverer every day. Perhaps the time will come

when we shall be ashamed if we can't walk the tight-rope.

CLARA. There goes the church bell.

MOTHER. Well, child, I will pray for you. And as for this Leonard of yours, love him as he loves God, neither more nor less. That's what my old mother said to me when she was leaving this world, and giving me her blessing. I've kept it long enough and now I'll pass it on to you.

CLARA (*giving her a bunch of flowers*). There!

MOTHER. I'm sure that came from Karl.

CLARA (*nods, then aside*). I wish it did! If anything is to give her real pleasure, it's got to come from him.

MOTHER. Oh, he's a good boy and loves his mother. (*Goes.*)

CLARA (*looking after her through the window*). There she goes. Three times I dreamed she lay in her coffin, and now—— Oh these malicious dreams, they clothe themselves in our fears to terrify our hopes. I'll never give heed to a dream again. I'll never again take pleasure in a good one, and then I won't have to worry about the evil one that follows it. How firm and sure is her step! She's already near the churchyard. I wonder who'll be the first to meet her—not that it matters, but—— (*starting in terror*). The grave-digger! He has just dug a grave and is climbing out of it. She's nodded to him, and is looking down into the dark hole with a smile. Now she's thrown the flowers in, and is going into church. (*Music is heard.*) They're singing: "Now thank we all our God." (*Folding her hands.*) Yes! yes! If mother had died, I'd never have been happy again, for—— (*looking towards heaven*). But Thou art gracious, Thou art merciful! I wish I had a faith like the Catholics, so that I could give Thee something. I would empty my money-box and buy Thee a lovely golden heart and wreathe it with roses. Our clergyman says that gifts are nothing in Thy eyes, for all is Thine, and we should not try to give Thee what Thou hast. But then, everything in the house belongs to father, and yet he's pleased when I buy him a kerchief with his

own money, and embroider it neatly and put it on his plate on his birthday. Yes, he honours me by wearing it on special holidays, Christmas or Whitsuntide. Once I saw a tiny little Catholic girl bringing her cherries to the altar. How I loved to see her! They were the first of the year, and I could see how she longed to eat them. But still she fought against her innocent desire, and threw them down quickly to make an end of temptation. The priest, saying Mass, had just raised the chalice, and looked frowningly at her, and the child hurried away terrified, but the Virgin over the altar smiled down so tenderly, as if she would have liked to step out of her frame, run after the child, and kiss her. I did it for her. There's Leonard. Ah!

Scene 4

Leonard (*outside*). Are you dressed?

Clara. Why so tender, so thoughtful? I'm not a princess.

Leonard (*coming in*). I didn't think you were alone. As I went past, I thought I saw Barbara from next-door at the window.

Clara. That's why, then, is it?

Leonard. You are always cross. A fellow can stay away for a fortnight; it can have rained and shone again ten times over; but each time I see *you*, there's always the same old cloud on your face.

Clara. It used to be so different.

Leonard. Yes, indeed! If you'd always looked as you do now, we'd never have been good friends.

Clara. What does it matter?

Leonard. Oh, you feel as free of me as that, do you? It suits me all right. So (*meaningly*) that toothache of yours the other day was a false alarm?

Clara. Oh, Leonard, you'd no right to do it!

Leonard. No right to bind what is dearest to me—yourself—by the last bond of all? And just when I stood in danger of losing it! Do you think I didn't see you exchanging quiet glances with the secretary? That

was a nice holiday for me! I take you to a dance and——

CLARA. You never stop worrying me. I looked at him, of course. Why should I deny it? but only because of the moustache he's grown at college. It—— (*she breaks off*).

LEONARD. Suits him so well, eh? That's what you mean. Oh, you women! You like the mark of the soldier even in the silliest caricature. The little round-faced fop—I hate him! I don't conceal it; he's stood in my way with you long enough;—with that forest of hair in the middle of his face, he looks like a white rabbit trying to hide in a thicket.

CLARA. I haven't praised him yet. You don't need to start running him down.

LEONARD. You still seem to take a warm interest in him.

Clara. We played together as children, and after that —you know all about it.

LEONARD. Oh yes, I know. That's just the trouble.

CLARA. Well, surely it was natural for me, seeing him again for the first time after so long, to look at him and wonder at——

LEONARD. Why did you blush then, when he looked at you?

CLARA. I thought he was looking to see if the wart on my left cheek had got any bigger. You know I always think that when anybody stares at me, and it makes me blush. The wart seems to grow, whenever it's looked at!

LEONARD. That may be. But it troubled me, and I said to myself: " I'll test her this very night. If she really wants to be my wife, she knows that she's running no risks. If she says No——"

CLARA. Oh, you spoke a wicked, wicked word, when I pushed you away, and jumped up from the seat. The moon that had shone, for my help, right into the arbour, wrapped herself cunningly in the wet clouds. I tried to hurry away, but something held me back. At first I thought it was you, but it was the rose-tree, whose

thorns had caught my dress like teeth. You reviled me, until I could no longer trust my own heart. You stood before me, like one demanding a debt. And I—— O God!

LEONARD. I can't regret it. I know that it was the only way of keeping you. Your old love had opened its eyes and I could not close them fast enough.

CLARA. When I got home, I found my mother ill, dangerously ill. Smitten down suddenly, as if by an unseen hand. Father had wanted to send for me, but she wouldn't let him, because of spoiling my pleasure. Imagine how I felt, when I heard that! I kept out of the way. I didn't dare to touch her; I trembled. She thought it was just a child's concern, and motioned me to go to her. When I went up to her slowly, she pulled me down and kissed my desecrated mouth. I gave way altogether, I wanted to confess to her. I wanted to tell her what I thought and felt: "*I'm* to blame for your lying there like that." I did so, too, but tears and sobs choked my words; she took father's hand and said, looking at me so happily—"What a tender heart!"

LEONARD. She's well again now. I came to congratulate her, and—what do you think?

CLARA. And what?

LEONARD. To ask your father for your hand in marriage!

CLARA. Ah!

LEONARD. Isn't that all right?

CLARA. Right? It would be the death of me, if I were not soon your wife. But you don't know my father. He doesn't know why we're in a hurry. He can't know, and we can't tell him. And he's told me a hundred times that he will only give me, as he puts it, to a man who has both love in his heart and bread in his cupboard. He will say, "Wait a year or two, my son," and then what will you answer?

LEONARD. Why, you little silly, that difficulty's all over. I've got the job, I'm cashier now.

CLARA. You're cashier? And what about the other candidate, the parson's nephew?

LEONARD. He came drunk into the exam., bowed to the stove instead of to the mayor, and knocked three cups off the table when he sat down. You know how hot-tempered the old boy is. "Sir!" he began, but he bit his lips and controlled himself, although his eyes flashed through his spectacles like two snakes ready to spring, and all his face was working. Then came the arithmetic and ha! ha! my opponent used a system of tables he had invented himself, and got quite original results. "He's all astray," said the mayor, and held out his hand to me with a glance that told me the job was mine. I put it reverently to my lips, although it stank of tobacco, and here's the appointment, signed and sealed.

CLARA. That's a——

LEONARD. Surprise, eh? Well, it's not altogether an accident. Why do you think I never turned up here for a whole fortnight?

CLARA. How do I know. I should think because we quarrelled on that last Sunday.

LEONARD. I was cunning enough to bring that little quarrel about on purpose, so that I might stay away without causing you too much surprise.

CLARA. I don't understand you.

LEONARD. I dare say not. I made use of the time in paying court to that little hump-backed niece of the mayor's, who has so much weight with him. She's his right hand, just as the bailiff's his left. Don't misunderstand me! I didn't say pleasant things to her directly, except for a compliment on her hair, which is red, as you know. I only said a few things, that pleased her, about you.

CLARA. About me?

LEONARD. Yes, why should I keep it back? It was all done with the best intentions. You talk as if I had never been in earnest about you, as if—— Enough! That affair lasted till I'd got *this* in my hand, and she'll know which way I meant it, the credulous little man-mad fool, when she hears the banns read in church.

CLARA. Leonard!

LEONARD. Child! Child! Just you be as harmless as a dove, and I'll be as wise as a serpent. Then we shall fulfil the words of the Gospel, for man and wife are but one. (*He laughs.*) And it wasn't altogether an accident either, that young Herrmann was drunk at the most important moment of his life. I'm sure you never heard that he went in for boozing!

CLARA. Not a word.

LEONARD. That made it all the easier. Three glasses did it. Two chums of mine went up to him and clapped him on the back. "Can we congratulate you?" "Not yet." "Oh, but it's all settled beforehand. Your uncle——" And then—"drink, pretty creature, drink!" When I was on my way here this morning, he was standing by the river looking gloomily over the parapet of the bridge. I grinned and nodded, and asked him whether he'd dropped anything into the water. "Yes," said he, without looking up, "and perhaps it's as well for me to jump in after it."

CLARA. You wretch! Get out of my sight!

LEONARD. Yes? (*Pretending to go.*)

CLARA. O my God, and I am chained to this man!

LEONARD. Don't be childish. Just one word more in confidence. Has your father still got that two hundred pounds with the apothecary?

CLARA. I know nothing about it.

LEONARD. You know nothing about so important a matter?

CLARA. Here comes father.

LEONARD. You understand, the apothecary is supposed to be going bankrupt. That's why I asked.

CLARA. I must go into the kitchen. (*Goes.*)

LEONARD (*alone*). In that case there's nothing to be got here. I can well believe it, for, if an extra letter happened to get on old Anthony's gravestone by mistake, his ghost would walk till it was scratched out. That's the sort of man he is. He'd think it dishonest to own more of the alphabet than was due to him.

Scene 5

Enter Anthony.

Anthony. Good morning, Mr. Cashier. (*Takes his hat off and puts on a woollen cap.*) Will you allow an old man to keep his head covered?

Leonard. You've heard, then——

Anthony. Heard last night. When I was on my way, in the evening, to measure the old miller for his last abode, I heard two good friends of yours railing against you. So I said to myself "Leonard, at any rate, hasn't broken his neck!" I got particulars at the dead man's house from the sexton, who had arrived there before me, to console the widow, and to get drunk at the same time.

Leonard. And yet you let Clara wait till I told her?

Anthony. If you weren't in a hurry to give her the pleasure, why should I be? I don't light any candles in my house except my own. Then I know that nobody can come and blow them out, just when we're enjoying them.

Leonard. You surely don't think that I——

Anthony. Think? About you? About anybody? I shape planks with my tools, I'll admit, but never a man with my thoughts. I got over that sort of folly long ago. When I see a tree in leaf, I say to myself: It'll soon be in bloom. And when it's in bloom: Now it'll bear fruit. I don't get taken in there, so I stick to the old custom. But I think nothing about men, nothing at all, neither bad nor good. So that when they disappoint first my fears and then my hopes, I don't need to go red and white in turn. I simply get knowledge and experience out of them, and I take the cue from my pair of eyes. They can't think either, they just see. I thought I knew all about you already, but now you're here again, I have to admit that I only half knew you.

Leonard. Master Anthony, you've got it the wrong way about. A tree depends on wind and weather, but a man has rule and law inside of him.

ANTHONY. Do you think so? Ah, we old men owe a lot to death, for letting us knock about so long among you young fellows and giving us the chance to get educated. Once upon a time the world was foolish enough to believe that the father was there to educate the son. Now, it's the other way. The son has to put the finishing touches on his father, lest the old simpleton should disgrace himself in the grave before the worms. Thank God, I've an excellent teacher in this boy, Karl, of mine; he wages ruthless war upon my prejudices, and doesn't spoil the old fellow with too much indulgence. Only this morning, for instance, he's taught me two new lessons. And very skilfully too, without so much as opening his mouth, without even showing himself; in fact, just by not doing so. In the first place, he has shown me that you don't need to keep your word; secondly, that it's unnecessary to go to church and freshen up your memory of God's commandments. Last night he promised me he'd go, and I counted on it, for I thought, "He'll surely want to thank the Creator for sparing his mother's life." But he wasn't there, and I was quite comfortable in my pew, which indeed is a bit small for two. I wonder how he'd like it, if I were to act on this new lesson of his at once, and break my word to him? I promised him a new suit on his birthday, and so I have a good chance of seeing what pleasure he would take in a ready pupil. But—prejudice, prejudice! I shan't do it.

LEONARD. Perhaps he wasn't well——

ANTHONY. That may be. I only need to ask my wife. She'll be sure to tell me he's sick. She tells me the truth about everything on earth except that boy. And even if he isn't sick—there you young men have the pull over us old folks again. You can do your devotions anywhere; you can say your prayers when you're out bird-snaring, or taking a walk, or even in a public-house. "'Our father, which art in Heaven'—Good-morning, Peter, coming to the dance to-night?—'Hallowed be Thy Name'—Yes, you may smile, Katherine, but you'll see—'Thy will be done'—By God, I'm not shaved

yet,' "—and so on to the end, when you pronounce your own blessing, since you're just as much a man as the parson, and there's as much virtue in a blue coat as in a black. I've nothing against it. If you want to insert seven drinks between the seven petitions, what does it matter? I can't prove to any one that beer and religion don't go together. Perhaps it will get into the prayer-book some day, as a new way of taking communion. But I, old sinner that I am, am not strong enough to follow the fashion. I can't catch devotion in the street, as if it were a cock-chafer. The twittering of sparrows and swallows cannot take the place of the organ for me. If my heart is to be uplifted, I must first hear the heavy iron church-doors clang behind me, and imagine they are the gates of the world. The high walls with their narrow windows, that only let the bright bold light of the world filter dimly through, must close in upon me, and in the distance I must see the dead-house with the walled-in skull. Well—better is better.

LEONARD. You take it too seriously.

ANTHONY. Without doubt. And I must admit as an honest man that it didn't work to-day. I lost the mood for worship when I was in church, because of the empty seat beside me, and found it again outside, under the pear-tree in my garden. You are surprised? See, I was going home sad and depressed, like a man that's had his harvest spoilt; for children are just like land, you sow good seeds and get tares in return. I stood still under the pear-tree, that the caterpillars have devoured. "Yes," I thought, "my boy is like this tree, bare and empty." Then I seemed to get thirsty, and felt as if I must go to the inn and have a drink. I was deceiving myself. It wasn't beer that I wanted. I wanted to find my boy and rate him, and I knew for certain I should find him there. I was just going, when the wise old tree dropped a juicy pear at my feet, as if to say: Quench your thirst with that, and don't insult me by comparing me with your knave of a son. I thought better of it, ate the pear and went home.

LEONARD. Do you know that the apothecary is going bankrupt?

ANTHONY. It doesn't concern me.

LEONARD. Not at all?

ANTHONY. Yes, it does! I am a Christian, and the man has children.

LEONARD. He has more creditors than children. Children are creditors too, in a way.

ANTHONY. Lucky the man who has neither the one nor the other!

LEONARD. But I thought you yourself——

ANTHONY. That's settled long ago.

LEONARD. You're a cautious man. Of course, you called in your money—as soon as you saw that the old herbalist was going downhill.

ANTHONY. Yes, I've no need to tremble at losing what I lost long ago.

LEONARD. You're joking.

ANTHONY. It's a fact.

CLARA (*looking in*). Did you call, father?

ANTHONY. Are your ears burning already? We weren't talking about you.

CLARA. The newspaper! (*Goes.*)

LEONARD. You're a philosopher.

ANTHONY. What does that mean?

LEONARD. You can control yourself.

ANTHONY. I sometimes wear a millstone round my neck instead of a collar. That has stiffened my backbone!

LEONARD. Let him who can do likewise!

ANTHONY. Whoever has so worthy a helper, as I appear to have in you, can surely dance under his burden. Why, you've gone quite pale! There's sympathy for you!

LEONARD. I hope you don't mistake me.

ANTHONY. Certainly not. (*Rapping on a cupboard.*) Funny thing that you can't see through wood, isn't it?

LEONARD. I don't understand you.

ANTHONY. How foolish grandfather Adam was to take Eve, although she was stark naked and didn't even bring a fig-leaf with her. We two, you and I, would

have whipped her out of paradise for a vagabond. Don't you think so?

LEONARD. You are annoyed at your son. I came to ask for your daughter's——

ANTHONY. Stop! Perhaps I might not say "No."

LEONARD. I hope you won't. And I'll tell you what I think. Even the holy patriarchs did not despise their wives' dowries. Jacob loved Rachel and courted her for seven years, but he was pleased, too, with the fat rams and ewes that he earned in her father's service. It does him no disgrace, to my mind, and I don't wish to shame him by doing better. I should like to have seen your daughter bring twenty pounds with her. Naturally. It would have been all the better for her, for when a girl brings her bed with her, she doesn't need to start carding wool and spinning yarn. But she hasn't got it, and what does it matter? We'll take lenten soup for Sunday's dinner, and feast on our Sunday joint at Christmas. We can manage that way.

ANTHONY (*shakes his hand*). You speak well, and the Lord approves your words. So I'll try to forget that my daughter put a cup for you on the tea-table every evening, and you never came for a fortnight. And now that you're going to be my son-in-law, I'll tell you where my two hundred pounds have gone.

LEONARD (*aside*). So he has lost them. Well, I shan't need to take any sauce from the old werewolf, when he's my father-in-law.

ANTHONY. I had a hard time when I was young. I wasn't born a prickly hedgehog any more than you were, but I've turned into one by degrees. At first all my prickles were turned inside and people for fun used to nip my smooth sensitive skin and laugh when I shrank back, because the points went into my heart and bowels. But that wouldn't do for me. I turned my skin inside out and now the prickles get into their fingers, and I have peace.

LEONARD (*aside*). The devil's own peace, I should think!

ANTHONY. My father never rested night and day, and

worked himself into his grave when he was only thirty. My poor mother made a living, as best she could, with her spinning-wheel. I grew up without any schooling. When I got bigger and still could earn nothing, I should have liked at the least to go without eating. But if I did pretend to be sick at dinner-time and push my plate back, what was the good? My stomach was too much for me at supper-time, and I had to be well again. My greatest sorrow was my own clumsiness. I would quarrel with myself over it, as if I was to blame, as if I had provided myself in the womb with nothing but wolf's teeth and deliberately left behind me every useful craft and quality. I was fit to blush when the sun shone on me. As soon as I was confirmed, the man they buried yesterday, old Master Gebhardt, came into our little room. He wrinkled his brow and twisted his face, as he always did when he had something good in his mind; then he said to my mother: " Have you brought this boy into the world to eat your head off? " I was just about to cut myself a slice of bread, but I felt so ashamed that I quickly put the loaf back in the cupboard. My mother was annoyed at his words. She stopped her wheel, and retorted hotly that her son was a good boy. " Well, we shall see," replied old Gebhardt, " if he wants, he can come now, just as he stands, into my workshop. I want no apprentice money. He'll get his food, and I'll see to his clothes, too. And if he's willing to get up early and go to bed late, he'll get a chance now and then of earning a little money for his old mother." Mother began to cry and I began to dance, and when at last we started to speak, the old man closed his ears and motioned to me to come. I didn't need to put my hat on, because I hadn't got one. I followed him without even saying good-bye to my mother, and when I got half-an-hour off on my first Sunday to go and see her, he sent her half a ham with me. God's peace on his grave! I can still hear him, in that half-angry way of his: " By Gosh, under your coat with it, for fear my wife should see! "

LEONARD. You can weep, then?

ANTHONY (*wiping his eyes*). Yes, I hardly dare let myself think of that. However well the source of tears in me is stopped up, that opens it afresh every time. Well, it's a good thing, too. If ever I get dropsy, there'll be the less water to tap off. (*Changing his tone.*) What do you think? If you went on a Sunday afternoon to smoke a pipe with the man you owed everything to, and found him all dazed and confused, with a knife in his hand, the very knife you had cut him his bread with hundreds of times, and bleeding at the throat and holding a cloth to the wound in terror——

LEONARD. Is *that* how his end came?

ANTHONY. And if you came in time to save him and help him, not just by taking his knife from him and binding up his wound, but by giving him a dirty two hundred pounds you'd saved up, all in secret, because else he wouldn't take it,—what would you do?

LEONARD. Being a free man without wife or child, I'd sacrifice the money.

ANTHONY. And if you had ten wives, like the Turks, and as many children as were promised to Father Abraham, and you had only a minute to decide in, you'd—well, anyway you're going to be my son-in-law. Now you know where the money is. I can tell you today because my old master was buried yesterday. A month ago I'd have kept it to myself on my death-bed. I put the I O U under the dead man's head before they nailed up his coffin. If I could write, I would have put " Honourably paid " at the bottom, but all I could do in my ignorance was to tear the paper lengthways. Now he'll sleep in peace, and I hope I shall too, when I stretch myself some day by his side.

SCENE 6

MOTHER (*comes in quickly*). Do you know me still?

ANTHONY (*pointing to the wedding-dress*). The frame has kept well, but the picture's gone a bit. There seem to have been a lot of spiders' webs on it. Well, the time was long enough!

MOTHER. Haven't I a frank husband? But I don't need to praise him in particular. Frankness is the virtue of all husbands.

ANTHONY. Are you sorry that you had more gilt on you at twenty than at fifty?

MOTHER. Certainly not. If it weren't so, I'd be ashamed of us both.

ANTHONY. Well there, give me a kiss. I have had a shave and I'm in a better temper than usual.

MOTHER. I'll say " Yes " just to see if you still know how to kiss. It's a long time since you thought of trying.

ANTHONY. Dear old mother. I won't wish that you should close my eyes. It's a hard task, and I'll do it for you instead. I'll do you that last service of love. But you must give me time, do you hear? Time to prepare and steel myself, and not make a mess of it. It's far too soon yet.

MOTHER. Thank God, we are to be together a little longer.

ANTHONY. I hope so, indeed. Why, your cheeks are quite rosy again!

MOTHER. A queer little man, that new grave-digger. He was digging a grave, as I was going to church this morning. I asked him whom it was for. " For whom God will," says he, " perhaps for myself. I might have the same experience as my grandfather. He once had got an extra grave ready, and that night when he was going home from the inn, he fell in and broke his neck."

LEONARD (*who has been reading the paper all the time*). The fellow doesn't belong to this town; he can tell us any lies he likes.

MOTHER. I asked him why he didn't wait till there was an order for a grave. " I'm invited to a wedding to-day," he said, " and I'm prophet enough to know that I shall feel it in my head to-morrow morning. Then somebody's sure to have gone and died, just to spite me, and that would mean getting up early without finishing my sleep."

ANTHONY. " You fathead," I'd have said, " what if the grave doesn't fit? "

MOTHER. That's what I said. But he can shake out sharp answers as quick as the devil can shake out fleas. " I've made it to fit Weaver John," says he, " he's as big as King Saul, head and shoulders above everybody else. So anybody can come that likes—he won't find his house too small for him. And if it's too big, it'll hurt no one but me. I'm an honourable man and won't charge for an inch over the coffin-length." I threw my flowers in, and said, " Now it's occupied."

ANTHONY. I think the fellow was only joking, but that's bad enough. Digging graves in advance is like setting death-traps. The scoundrel ought to be sacked for it. (*To* LEONARD, *who is reading.*) Any news? Is some kind creature looking for a poor widow who could do with a few pounds? Or is it the other way about, the widow looking for the friend that will give her them?

LEONARD. There's news of a jewel-robbery. Funny thing! It shows that, although times are bad, there are still people among us that own jewels.

ANTHONY. A jewel-robbery! At whose house?

LEONARD. At Wolfram's, the merchant's.

ANTHONY. Wolfram's — impossible! That's where Karl went to polish a desk a few days ago.

LEONARD. They were stolen from the desk, right enough.

MOTHER (*to* ANTHONY). May God forgive you for saying that!

ANTHONY. You're right. It was a base thought.

MOTHER. I must say, that to your son you're only half a father.

ANTHONY. We won't talk about that to-day, wife.

MOTHER. Do you think he must be bad, just because he's different from you?

ANTHONY. Where is he now? It's long past dinner-time. I'll wager the food is all boiled away or dried up, because Clara has secret orders not to set the table till he comes.

MOTHER. Where do you think he is? At most he'll

be playing skittles. He has to go to the farthest alley, so that you won't find him, and then of course it takes him a long time to get back. I don't know what you have against the game; it's harmless enough.

ANTHONY. Against the game? I've nothing at all against it. Fine gentlemen must have their amusements. But for the kings of spades and diamonds, real kings would often find time heavy on their hands. And if there were no skittles—who knows?—dukes and princes might be rolling our heads about. But there's no worse folly for a working man than to waste his hard-earned money on games. What a man has laboured for by the sweat of his brow, that he should honour and value highly, unless he wants to lose his balance altogether and grow to despise his honest work. How it hurts me to throw away a shilling! (*Door bell rings.*)

MOTHER. There he comes.

SCENE 7

Enter BAILIFF ADAM *and* SECOND BAILIFF.

ADAM (*to* ANTHONY). Now you may go and pay your bet. *People in red coats with blue facings* (*with emphasis*) would never come into *your* house! Eh? Well, here you have two of us. (*To* SECOND BAILIFF.) Why don't you keep your hat on, as I do? Who's going to stand on ceremony, when he's among his equals?

ANTHONY. Equals, you cur?

ADAM. You're right, we're not among equals. Knaves and thieves are not our equals! (*Pointing to the cupboard.*) Open that! And then three paces back! Don't juggle anything out of it.

ANTHONY. What! What!

CLARA (*bringing cloth for dinner*). Should I—— (*stops*).

ADAM (*showing a paper*). Can you read writing?

ANTHONY. How should I, when my schoolmaster couldn't?

ADAM. Well, listen! Your son has been stealing jewels. We've got the thief already. Now we are going to search the house.

MOTHER. Jesus!—(*falls down ; dies*).

CLARA. Oh, mother, mother! Look at her eyes!

LEONARD. I'll fetch a doctor.

ANTHONY. No need.—That's the last face. I've seen it hundreds of times. Good-night, Teresa. You died when you heard it. That shall be put on your gravestone.

LEONARD. Perhaps I'd better——(*going*). How awful! But it's a good thing for me. (*Goes out.*)

ANTHONY (*takes out his keys and throws them on the floor*). There! Open up! Drawers and cupboards! Bring me an axe! I've lost the key of the chest. Oho! Knaves and thieves, eh! (*Pulls out his pockets.*) I don't find anything here!

SECOND BAILIFF. Master Anthony, compose yourself! Everybody knows you're the honestest man in the town.

ANTHONY. Is that so? (*Laughing*). Yes, I've used up all the honesty there was in the family. Poor boy! There was none left for him. She, too—(*pointing to the dead body*)—was far too respectable. Who knows whether my daughter——(*Suddenly to* CLARA.) What do you think, my innocent child?

CLARA. Oh, father!

SECOND BAILIFF (*to* ADAM). Have you no sympathy?

ADAM. Sympathy? Am I feeling in the old man's pockets? Am I making him take his socks off and turn up his boots? I meant to begin with that, for I hate him, as I never hated, since that affair at the inn, when he—— You know the story and you'd have been insulted too, if you'd any self-respect in you. (*To* CLARA.) Where's your brother's room?

CLARA (*pointing*). At the back. (BAILIFFS *go off.*) Father, he's innocent! He must be! He's your son, and he's my brother!

ANTHONY. Innocent, when he's murdered his mother? (*Laughs*).

GIRL (*with letter to* CLARA). From Mr. Leonard. (*Goes out.*)

ANTHONY. You don't need to read it. He's deserted you. (*Claps his hands.*) Bravo, you rascal!

CLARA (*after reading*). My God, he has!

ANTHONY. Never mind him.

CLARA. But, father, I must!

ANTHONY. Must! Must! What do you mean? Are you—— (BAILIFFS *return*).

ADAM (*maliciously*). Seek and ye shall find!

SECOND BAILIFF (*to* ADAM). What are you thinking about? Was it true, then?

ADAM. Hold your jaw. (*Both go out.*)

ANTHONY. He's innocent, and you, you——

CLARA. Oh, father, you're awful!

ANTHONY (*takes her by the hand, very gently*). My daughter, Karl is a bungler after all. He killed his mother, but what of that? His father's left alive. You help him out! You can't expect him to do it all by himself. You finish *me* off! The old tree looks pretty knotty yet, doesn't it? But it's shaking already. It won't give you much trouble to fell it. You don't need an axe. You've a pretty face. I've never praised you before, but let me tell you now, to give you courage and confidence. Your eyes and nose and mouth are sure to please; you turn into—you understand!—but it seems to me you're that way already.

CLARA (*almost demented, flings herself with upraised arms at the dead woman's feet, and calls out like a child*). Oh, mother, mother!

ANTHONY. Take the hand of the dead and swear to me that you are as you should be.

CLARA. I—swear—that—I—will—never—bring—shame—upon—you.

ANTHONY. Good. (*Puts his hat on.*) It's a fine day. We'll run the gauntlet, up street and down street. (*Goes out.*)

ACT II

SCENE—SAME.

SCENE I

ANTHONY *gets up from table.* CLARA *begins to clear away dishes.*

ANTHONY. Have you still no appetite?

CLARA. I've had enough, father.

ANTHONY. Enough of nothing!

CLARA. I had a bite in the kitchen.

ANTHONY. A poor appetite means a bad conscience. Well, we shall see. Or was there poison in the soup, as I dreamed last night, a bit of wild hemlock that was plucked with the other herbs by mistake? That would be a wise thing for you to do.

CLARA. Almighty God!

ANTHONY. Forgive me, I—— To the devil with that pale, suffering look of yours, stolen from the Mother of Christ! Young people should look rosy. There's only one man who has the right to parade a face like that, and he doesn't do it. Ho! A box on the ears for every man that says " Uh " when he cuts his finger. Nobody has the right to now, for here's a man that—— Self-praise is no recommendation, but what did I do, when our neighbour was going to nail the lid on your mother's coffin?

CLARA. You snatched the hammer from him and did it yourself, and said, " This is my masterpiece." The choir-master, who was singing the funeral-hymn at the door with the choristers, thought you'd gone mad.

ANTHONY. Mad! (*Laughs.*) Mad! Ay, ay, it's a wise man that cuts his own throat when the time comes. Mine seems to be too tough, or else—— A man lives in his corner of the world, and imagines he's sitting by the

fireside in a comfortable inn, when suddenly some one puts a light on the table, and behold, he's in a robber's den, and it goes bang! bang! on all sides. But no matter. Luckily my heart's made of stone.

CLARA. So it is, father.

ANTHONY. What do you know about it? Do you think you have any right to join your curses to mine, because that clerk of yours left you in the lurch? Some one else will take you for a walk on Sunday afternoons, some one else will tell you that your cheeks are red and your eyes are blue, some one else will make you his wife, if you deserve it. But when you've borne your burden honourably for thirty years, without complaining, when you've patiently endured suffering and bereavement and all manner of misfortune, and then your son, who should be making a soft pillow for you in your old age, comes and heaps disgrace on you, till you feel like calling to the earth, "Swallow me, if you can stomach me, for I am more foul than you"—*then* you may pour out all the curses that I am holding back; then you may tear your hair and beat your breast. That's the privilege you shall have over me, since you're a woman.

CLARA. Oh, Karl!

ANTHONY. I often wonder what I shall do when I see him again, when he comes in some evening before we've got the lamp lit, with his head shaved, prison-fashion, and stutters out "Good-evening" with his hand glued to the door-latch. I shall do something, I know, but what? (*Grinding his teeth.*) And if they keep him ten years, he'll find me still. I shall live till then, I know that. Mark you, Death! From now on I'm a stone to your scythe. Sooner shall it be shattered in your hands, than move me an inch.

CLARA (*taking his hand*). Father, do lie down for half an hour.

ANTHONY. To dream you are in child-bed, eh? And jump up and lay hold of you and then remember, and say I didn't know what I was doing? Thank you, no. My sleep has dismissed its magician and hired a prophet instead, who shows me fearful things with his bloody

fingers. I don't know how it is. Anything seems possible to me now. Ugh! The future makes me shudder, like a glass of water seen through a microscope —is that right, Mr. Choir-master, you've spelt it for me often enough? I did that once at the fair in Nürnberg, and couldn't take a drink the whole day after it. I saw our Karl last night with a pistol in his hand. When I looked at him more closely, he fired. I heard a cry, but I couldn't see anything for smoke. When the smoke cleared, there was no split skull to be seen, but in the meantime my fine son had become a rich man. He was standing counting gold pieces from one hand into the other, and his face—devil take me if a man could look more placid, if he had slaved all day and just locked up his work-shop. We might look out for that. We might first sit in judgment, and then go ourselves before the greatest judge of all.

CLARA. Do calm yourself!

ANTHONY. Cure yourself, you mean. Why am I sick? Give me the healing draught, physician! Your brother is the worst of sons. You be the best of daughters. Here I stand before the world like a worthless bankrupt. I owed it a worthy man, to take the place of this invalid here, and I've pawned off a rogue on it. You be the woman your mother was. Then people will say: " It wasn't the parents' fault that the boy went wrong, for the daughter is going the right road and leads the way for others." (*With fearful coldness.*) And I'll do my share. I'll make it easier for you than the others. The moment I see people pointing their fingers at you,—I shall—(*passing his finger over his throat*) shave myself, and, this I'll swear, I shall shave myself away altogether. You can say a fright did it—a horse ran away in the street, or the cat knocked a chair over, or a mouse ran up my legs. Those that know me will have their doubts, because I'm not particularly nervous, but what does it matter? I can't go on living in a world where only sympathy keeps people from spitting when they see me.

CLARA. Merciful God, what shall I do?

ANTHONY. Nothing at all, my child. I'm too hard on you. I know it well. Nothing at all. Just stay as you are and it will be all right. I've suffered such injustice that I must practise it, or go under altogether, when it takes hold of me. I was crossing the road just now when Small-pox John came along, that vagabond I had locked up years ago, after he'd robbed me three times. There was a time when the wretch didn't dare to look at me, but now he walks up coolly and holds out his hand. I wanted to box his ears, but thought better of it and didn't even spit. Aren't we cousins of a week's standing? And isn't it right for relations to greet one another? Our good man, the parson, came to see me yesterday, and said a man was responsible for nobody but himself, and it was unchristian arrogance in me to make myself answerable for my son, or else Adam would have to take it as much to heart as I. O God, I well believe that it doesn't disturb the arch-father's peace in paradise, when one of his great-great-grandchildren goes robbing and murdering, but didn't he tear his hair over Cain? No, no, it is too much! At times I feel like looking to see if my shadow hasn't gone blacker. I can bear anything, and I've proved it, anything but disgrace. Put as much weight round my neck as you like, but don't cut through the nerve that holds me together.

CLARA. But, father, Karl hasn't confessed to it yet, and they didn't find anything on him.

ANTHONY. What do I care about that? I went round the town, and inquired about his debts in all the pubs. I found that he owed more than he'd have earned from me in a quarter-year, even if he'd worked three times as hard as he did. Now I know why he used to work two hours later at night than I did, and got up earlier, too. But he saw it was no good. It was too much trouble, or it took too long, so he seized the opportunity when it came.

CLARA. You always think the worst of Karl. You always did. Do you remember how——?

ANTHONY. You talk just like your mother. And I'll

answer you as I used to answer her—by saying nothing.

CLARA. And what if Karl gets off? What if they find the jewels again?

ANTHONY. Then I'd hire a lawyer, and I'd sell my last shirt to find out whether the mayor had the right to imprison the son of an honourable man, or not. If so, I'd submit, for if it can happen to anybody, I must put up with it, even though I had to pay a thousand times dearer than others. It was fate, and when God strikes me, I fold my hands and say: "O Lord, thou knowest why." But if it was not so, if that man with the gold chain round his neck overstepped himself, because he couldn't think of anything except that the merchant who lost the jewels was his brother-in-law, then we'd see whether there's a hole in the law. The king knows full well that he must justly repay the obedience and loyalty of his subjects, and would wish least of all to be unfair to the smallest of them. We'll see then whether he'll stop the hole up for us. But this is all nonsense. It's as easy for your mother to rise from her grave as for that boy to clear himself. I've had no comfort from him, and never shall have. So remember what *you* owe me. Keep your word and then I won't have to keep mine. (*Goes, and turns back.*) I shan't be home till late. I'm going to see the old woodcutter in the hills. He's the only man who looks me in the face as he used to, because he knows nothing yet of my shame. He's deaf. They can't tell him anything without shrieking themselves hoarse, and then he mixes it all up and never gets the truth of it. (*Goes out.*)

SCENE 2

CLARA (*alone*). O God, O God, have mercy! Have mercy on this old man! Take me! It's the only way to help him. Look! The sunshine lies so golden on the street that the children snatch at it. The birds fly about. Flowers and plants are never weary of growing. Everything lives and wants to live. Thousands of sick people tremble before thee at this hour, O Death! Those

who called to thee in the oppression of the night, because their pain was more than they could bear, now once more find comfort in their beds. To thee I call! Spare him whose soul shrinks furthest from thee! Let him live until this lovely world again seems grey and desolate. Take me for him! I will not shudder at thy chilly hand. I will seize it bravely, and follow thee more gladly than ever any child of man has followed thee before.

Scene 3

Wolfram (*enters*). Good morning, Miss Clara, isn't your father at home?

Clara. He's just gone out.

Wolfram. I came to—my jewels have turned up!

Clara. O father, if only you were here! There are his spectacles! He's forgotten them. If only he'd notice it and come back! How did you find them? Where? At whose house?

Wolfram. My wife— Tell me frankly, Miss Clara, did you never hear anything strange about my wife?

Clara. I did.

Wolfram. That she—(*tapping his forehead*). What?

Clara. That she's a bit wrong in the head? Yes.

Wolfram (*bursting into anger*). My God! My God! All in vain! I've never let a servant go, that I've once taken into my house. I've paid each one double wages and winked at all sorts of carelessness, to purchase their silence, and yet—Oh the false, ungrateful creatures! Oh my poor children! 'Twas for your sakes alone that I tried to conceal it.

Clara. Don't blame your servants. They're innocent enough. Ever since that day the house next door was burned down, when your wife stood at the open window and laughed and clapped and puffed her cheeks and blew at the flames to fan them, people have had to choose between calling her a she-devil or a madwoman. And hundreds of people saw that.

Wolfram. That is true. Well, since the whole town knows my misfortune, it would be folly to ask you to

keep it quiet. Listen to me, then. This theft, that your brother is in prison for, was due to insanity.

CLARA. Your own wife——

WOLFRAM. I've known for a long time that she, who once was the noblest and kindest of women, had turned malicious and spiteful. She rejoices when she sees an accident, if a maid breaks a glass or cuts her finger. But I only discovered to-day, when it was too late, that she steals things about the house, hides money, and destroys papers. I had lain down on the bed and was just dozing off, when I saw her come quietly up to me and stare at me to see if I was asleep. I closed my eyes tight, and then she took my keys out of my waistcoat, that I'd hung over the chair, opened the desk, took some money out, locked the desk again, and put the key back. I was horrified, but I controlled myself and kept quiet. She left the room and I went after her on tip-toe. She went right to the top of the house and threw the money into an old chest of my grandfather's that stood empty there. Then she looked nervously about her on all sides, and hurried away without seeing me. I lit a candle and looked through the chest, and found there my youngest daughter's doll, a pair of the maid's slippers, an account book, some letters and unfortunately—or God be praised, which?—right at the bottom I found the jewels!

CLARA. Oh my poor mother! It is too shameful!

WOLFRAM. God knows, I'd sacrifice the trinkets if I could undo what's done. But I'm not to blame. Much as I honour your father, it was natural for me to suspect your brother. He had polished the desk, and the jewels disappeared with him. I noticed it almost immediately, because I had to get some papers out of the very drawer they were in. But I had no intention of taking severe steps against him. I informed bailiff Adam, and asked him to investigate the matter secretly; but he would not hear of caution. He said it was his duty to report the case at once and he was going to do it. Your brother was a boozer and a borrower, and had so much weight with the mayor that he could get him to do anything he wanted. The man seems to be incensed against

your father in the extreme. I don't know why. I simply couldn't calm him down. He stuffed his fingers in his ears and shouted as he ran, " If you'd made me a present of the jewels I wouldn't be as pleased as I am now! "

CLARA. The bailiff once set his glass down beside father's in the inn, and nodded to him to clink with him. Father pulled his away and said: " People in red coats with blue facings used once to have to drink out of wooden cans, and they used to have to stand outside at the window, or, if it rained, in the doorway; and they had to take their hats off, when the landlord served them, and if they wanted to clink with any one, they waited till old Fallmeister came along." O God, O God! Anything can happen in this world! Mother paid for that with her death.

WOLFRAM. Offend no one, and bad men least of all. Where's your father?

CLARA. Gone to see the wood-cutter in the hills.

WOLFRAM. I'll ride out and look for him. I've already been at the mayor's, but didn't find him at home. If I had, your brother would have been here by this time. However, the secretary sent a messenger at once. You'll see him before night. (*Goes out.*)

SCENE 4

CLARA (*alone*). Now I ought to be glad. O God! And all I can think of is—" It's only you now." And yet I feel as if I'm bound to think of something soon that will put it all right again.

SCENE 5

SECRETARY (*entering*). Good-day.

CLARA (*grasping chair as if falling*). He! Oh, if only he hadn't come back——

SEC. Your father's not at home?

CLARA. No.

Sec. I've brought good news. Your brother, Miss —Oh, Clara, I can't go on talking in this stiff way to you, with all the old tables and cupboards and chairs around me; my old acquaintances, that we played among when we were children. Good-day, you there! (*Nodding to a cupboard.*) How are you? You haven't changed.—I should think they'd put their heads together and laugh at me for a fool if I don't call you "Clara" as I used to.[1] If you don't like it, just think —"The poor chap's dreaming, I'll wake him up—I'll go up to him and show him (*with a toss of head*) I'm not a little girl now"—that was your mark when you were eleven (*pointing to a mark on the door*)—"but a proper grown-up, that can reach the sugar when it's put on the side-board." Do you remember? That was the spot, that was the stronghold, safe from us, even when it stood unlocked. When the sugar was there, we used to play at catching flies, because we couldn't bear to let them, flying about so merrily, get at what we couldn't reach!

Clara. I thought people forgot all those things when they had to study hundreds and thousands of books.

Sec. They do forget! I wonder what don't people forget over Justinian and Gaius! Boys, that kick against the A B C so obstinately, know why they do it. They have a sort of feeling that, if they leave the spelling-book alone, they'll never get at cross-purposes with the Bible. It's disgraceful how they tempt the innocent souls with the red cock, and the basket of eggs, till they say A of their own accord—and then there's no holding them! They tear down hill from A to Z, and on and on, till they are in the midst of *Corpus Juris* and realise to their horror what a desert they've been enticed into by those curséd twenty-six letters, which they first used in their play to make tasty, sweet-scented words like "cherry" and "rose."

Clara. And what happens then? (*Absently without interest.*)

Sec. That depends on temperament. Some work

[1] *German:* Ich muss "du" zu dir sagen.

their way through, and come out again into the light of day after three or four years. They're a bit thin and pale, but you can't blame them for that. I belong to them. Others lie down in the middle of the wood. They only want to rest, but they very seldom get up again. One of my own friends has drunk his beer under the shade of the "Lex Julia" for three years. He chose the place on account of the name. It recalls pleasant memories. Others get desperate and turn back. They are the biggest fools of all, for they're only allowed out of one thicket on condition that they plunge straight into another. And there are some there that never come to an end at all! (*Aside.*) What stuff a fellow will talk, when he has something in his mind and can't get it out!

CLARA. Everybody is merry and jolly to-day. It must be the fine weather.

SEC. Yes, in weather like this owls fall out of their nests, bats kill themselves, because they feel that the devil made them. The mole bores down into the earth till he loses his way and is stifled, unless he can eat through to the other side and come out in America! To-day every ear of corn puts out a double shoot, and every poppy goes twice as red as usual, if only for shame at not being so. Why should man remain behind? Is he to rob God of the one tribute that this world pays Him, a bright face and a clear eye, that reflects and glorifies all this splendour? Indeed, when I see these lazy-bones crawling out of their houses in the mornings with their brows all wrinkled, and glowering at heaven as if it were a sheet of blotting paper, I often think: "It'll rain soon. God will have to let down His curtain of clouds; He's bound to, so as not to be annoyed by such grimaces." Such fellows ought to be prosecuted as thwarters of holidays and destroyers of harvests. How should you give thanks for life, except by living? Rejoice, bird! else you don't deserve to have a throat!

CLARA. That is true, so true. It makes me want to cry.

SEC. I wasn't saying it against you. I can under-

stand your being a bit down this last week. I know your old man. But, God be praised, I can make you happy again and that's what I'm here for. You'll see your brother again to-night. People won't point their fingers at him, but at those who threw him into prison. Does that earn me a kiss, a sisterly one, if it can't be any other? Or should we play blind-man's-buff for it? If I don't catch you in ten minutes, I'll go without and take a slap on the cheek into the bargain.

CLARA (*to herself*). I feel as if I'd suddenly grown a thousand years old and time had stopped still over my head. I can't go back and I can't go forward. Oh, this immovable sunshine and all the gaiety about me!

SEC. You don't answer. Of course, I'd forgotten. You're engaged. O girl, why did you do that by me? And yet, have I any right to complain? She is all that's dear and good. All that's dear and good should have reminded me of her. And yet for years she was as good as dead to me. In return she has—— If only it were a *man* whom one could honour and respect! But this Leonard——

CLARA (*suddenly hearing the name*). I must go to him. That's it! I'm no longer the sister of a thief! O God, what do I want? He will, he must! Unless he's a very devil, all will be as it was. (*In horror.*) As it was. (*To* SECRETARY.) Don't be offended, Frederick.— What makes my legs so heavy all at once?

SEC. Are you going?

CLARA. To see Leonard, where else? I've only this one path to go in all the world.

SEC. You love him then?

CLARA (*excitedly*). Love him? It is him or death. Are you surprised that I choose him? I wouldn't do it if I were thinking of myself alone.

SEC. Him or death? Why, girl, this sounds like despair.

CLARA. Don't drive me mad. Don't speak to me! You! I love you! There! There! I'll shout it at you, as if I were already wandering beyond the grave, where no one blushes, where they all slink past one

another, cold and naked, because that terrible, holy nearness of God has laid bare the thoughts of each one down to the roots.

SEC. Me? You still love me? Clara, I suspected it when I saw you outside in the garden.

CLARA. Did you? He did, too. (*Dully, as if alone.*) He stood before me. He or I? Oh, my heart, my cursed heart! To prove to him and to myself that it wasn't so, or to crush it if it were so, I did what I now——(*bursting into tears*). O God in Heaven, I would have pity if I were thou and thou wert I!

SEC. Clara, be my wife! I came to you to look you in the eyes in the old way. If you had not understood my look, I would have gone away and said nothing. Now I offer you all that I am and all that I have. It's little, but it can grow. I'd have been here long ago, only your mother was ill—and then she died. (CLARA *laughs madly.*) Have courage, girl! You gave him your word. Is that on your mind? And I must say it's a devil of a nuisance. How could you——?

CLARA. Oh! Go on asking me how things combine to drive a poor girl mad! Sneers and mockery on all sides when you had gone to college and never wrote. "She's thinking about him." "She thinks his fun was meant seriously." "Does she get letters from him?" And then mother: "Stick to your equals." "Pride goes before a fall." "Leonard's a fine young man; everybody is surprised that you turn your back on him." And then my own heart: "If he's forgotten you, show him that you too——" O God!

SEC. I am to blame, I know. Well, what's hard is not therefore impossible. I'll get you free. Perhaps——

CLARA. Get me free!—Read that! (*throwing him* LEONARD'S *letter*).

SEC. (*reading*). As cashier—your brother—thief—very sorry—I have no choice in view of my office. (*To* CLARA.) Did he write that the day your mother died? Why, he goes on to express his sympathy at her sudden death!

CLARA. Yes, he did.

SEC. May he be— Dear God, the cats and snakes and other monsters that slipped through your fingers at the creation pleased Beelzebub, so that he made them after you. But he decked them out better than you did. He gave them human form. Now they stand shoulder to shoulder with mankind, and we don't recognise them till they begin to spit and scratch. (*To* CLARA.) Very good! Excellent! (*Tries to embrace her.*) Come! For eternity. With this kiss——

CLARA (*sinks into his arms*). No, not for ever. Don't let me fall,—but no kiss.

SEC. Girl, you don't love him, you've got your word back.

CLARA (*dully, drawing herself up again*). And yet I must go to him; I must go down on my knees to him and stutter: "Look at my father's white hairs; take me!"

SEC. Unhappy one, do I understand?

CLARA. Yes!

SEC. That's too much for any man. To have to lower one's eyes before *him*—a fellow that's only fit to be spat on. (*Pressing* CLARA *to him.*) You poor, poor child!

CLARA. Go, now go!

SEC. (*to himself, broodingly*). Or shoot the dog dead that knows it. If he only had pluck! If he'd only show himself! Could I force him? I wouldn't fear to meet him.

CLARA. I beg you——

SEC. (*going out*). After dark! (*Turns round and seizes* CLARA's *hand.*) Girl, here you stand— (*Turning away.*) Thousands of her sex would have cunningly concealed it, only to murmur it into one's ear in some hour of sweet forgetfulness. I feel what I owe you. (*Goes out.*)

SCENE 6

CLARA (*alone*). Close, close, my heart! Crush in upon thyself. Let not a drop of blood escape, to fire

anew the waning life in my veins. There again something like a hope arose in thee. I realise it now. I thought (*laughing*)—"That's too much for any man." And if—isn't it too much for you? Would you have courage to seize a hand that——? No, no, you would not have such base courage. You would have to bolt yourself into your prison, if they tried to open the gate from without. For ever—Oh, why does it stop, why doesn't it go on grinding for ever, why is there a pause now and then? That's why it seems so long. The tortured one thinks he is having a rest because the torturer has to stop and take breath; you breathe again, like a drowning man in the waves, when the whirlpool that is sucking him down, throws him up again, only to lay hold of him afresh. All he gains from it is a redoubled death-struggle.

"Well, Clara." Yes, father, I'll go, I'll go! Your daughter won't drive you to suicide. I shall soon be his wife, or—O God, no! I'm not begging for happiness, I'm begging for misery, the deepest misery — surely you'll grant me my misery. Away!—where is the letter? (*Taking it.*) There are three wells on the road to him. Let me stop at none of them. You have no right to, yet. (*Goes out.*)

ACT III

LEONARD'S *Room.*

SCENE 1

LEONARD (*writing at a table covered with documents*). There's the sixth sheet since dinner. How fine a man feels when he does his duty! Anybody could come into the room that liked, even the king himself—I would stand up, but I would not be embarrassed. Except for one man, that old joiner. But at bottom he can't trouble me much. Poor Clara! I'm sorry for her. It disturbs me to think of her. If it hadn't been for that one cursed evening. It was more jealousy than love that excited me, and I'm sure she only yielded to refute my reproaches, for she was as cold as death towards me. She has bad times ahead of her, and I shall have a lot of worry, too. Let each bear his lot. Above all things, I must make sure of that little humpbacked girl and not let her escape me when the storm breaks. Then I shall have the mayor on my side and need fear nothing.

SCENE 2

CLARA (*enters*). Good-evening, Leonard.

LEONARD. Clara? (*Aside.*) I didn't expect this. (*Aloud.*) Didn't you get my letter? Oh—perhaps your father's sent you to pay the rates. How much is it? (*Turning leaves in a journal.*) I ought to know it without looking it up.

CLARA. I've come to give you your letter back. Here it is. Read it again.

LEONARD (*reads it very seriously*). It's quite a sensible letter. How can a man, who's in charge of public money, marry into a family that — (*swallowing a word*) your brother belongs to?

CLARA. Leonard!

LEONARD. Perhaps the whole town's wrong? Your brother isn't in prison? Never been in prison? You're not the sister of—of your brother?

CLARA. Leonard, I'm my father's daughter. I don't come as the sister of an innocent man whose name has already been cleared—that's my brother;—nor as a girl who shudders at unmerited shame—for (*in a low voice*) I shudder more at you—I come in the name of the old man who gave me life.

LEONARD. What do you want?

CLARA. Can you ask? Oh, if only I were free to go! My father will cut his throat if I—marry me!

LEONARD. Your father——

CLARA. He has sworn it. Marry me!

LEONARD. Hand and throat are close cousins. They won't damage one another. Don't worry about that.

CLARA. He has sworn it.— Marry me, and then kill me —and I'll thank you more for the one than the other.

LEONARD. Do you love me? Did your heart tell you to come? Am I the man without whom you can't live or die?

CLARA. Answer that yourself.

LEONARD. Can you swear that you love me? That you love me as a girl should love the man who is to be bound to her for life?

CLARA. No, I can't swear that. But this I can swear. That whether I love you or not, you shall never know. I'll serve you, I'll work for you. You don't need to feed me. I'll keep myself. I'll sew and spin in the night-time for other people. I'll go hungry if I've no work to do. I'll eat my own flesh rather than go to my father and let him notice anything. If you strike me because your dog isn't handy, or you've done away with him, I'll swallow my own tongue rather than utter a sound that could let it out to the neighbours. I can't promise you that my skin shall not show the marks of your lash, but I'll lie about it, I'll say that I ran my head against the cupboard or that the floor was too much polished and I slipped on it. I'll do it before anybody has time

to ask me where the blue marks came from. Marry me —I shan't live long. And if it lasts too long for you, and you can't afford to divorce me, buy some poison at the chemist's and put it down as if it were for the rats. I'll take it without even a sign from you, and when I'm dying I'll tell the neighbours I thought it was crushed sugar.

LEONARD. Well, if you expect me to do all that, you won't be surprised if I say no.

CLARA. May God, then, not look upon me too hardly, if I come before He calls me. If it meant only me, I'd bear it; take it patiently, as well-deserved punishment for I don't know what, if people trampled on me in my misery, instead of helping me. I would love my child, even if it bore this man's features. I would weep so before it's helpless innocence, that it would not curse and despise its mother when it was older and wiser. But I'm not the only one. And when the judge asks me on the last day "Why did you kill yourself?" it will be an easier question to answer than "Why did you drive your father to it?"

LEONARD. You talk as if you were the first woman and the last. Thousands before you have gone through this and borne it. Thousands after you will get into your plight and accept their fate. Are they all so low, that you want to go away in a corner by yourself? They had fathers too, who invented heaps of new curses when they heard of it, and talked about death and murder. They were ashamed of themselves later on, and did penance for their curses and blasphemies. Why! they sat down and rocked the child, or fanned the flies off him!

CLARA. Oh, I can well believe that you don't understand how anybody in the world should keep his oath!

SCENE 3

BOY (*enters*). I've brought some flowers. I haven't to say who's sent them.

LEONARD. Oh, what lovely flowers! (*Strikes his brow.*)

The devil! That's stupid! *I* should have sent some! How am I to get out of it? I don't know much about these things, and the little girl will notice it; she has nothing else to think about. (*Takes the flowers.*) But I won't keep them all. (*To* CLARA.) These mean remorse and shame, don't they? Didn't you once tell me that?

[CLARA *nods.*

LEONARD (*to the boy*). Look here, boy. These are for me. I put them here, you see, over my heart. These red ones here, that burn like a glowing fire, you can take back. Do you understand? When my apples are ripe you can come again.

BOY. That's a long time yet! (*Goes out.*)

SCENE 4

LEONARD. Yes, Clara, you talked about keeping one's word, and just because I *am* a man of my word, I am compelled to answer as I do. I broke with you a week ago. You can't deny it. There lies the letter. (*He passes the letter; she takes it mechanically.*) I had good reason to; your brother—you say he's been cleared. I'm glad to hear it. In the course of this week I have made promises elsewhere. I had a perfect right to, because you didn't protest at the right time against my letter. In my own mind I was as free as before the law. Now you've come, but I've already given my word and taken somebody else's, yes—(*aside*) I wish it were so!—she's in the same condition as you.—I'm sorry for you —(*stroking back her hair,* CLARA *passive, as if she did not notice it*), but you'll understand that the mayor is not to be trifled with.

CLARA (*absently*). Trifled with!

LEONARD. Now, you're getting sensible. And as for your father, you can tell him straight to his face that he's to blame for it all. Don't stare at me like that, don't shake your head; it is so, my girl, it is so! Just tell him so; he'll understand and keep quiet, I'll answer for it. (*Aside.*) When a man gives away his daughter's dowry, he needn't be surprised if she's left on the shelf.

It puts my back up to think of it, and almost makes me wish the old boy was here to be lectured to. Why do I have to be cruel? Simply because he was a fool! Whatever happens, he's responsible for it, that's clear. (*To* CLARA.) Would you like me to talk to him, myself? I'll risk a black eye for your sake and go to him. He can be as rude as he likes, he can throw the boot-tree at me, but he'll have to swallow the truth, in spite of the belly-ache it gives him, and leave you in peace. Be assured of that. Is he at home?

CLARA (*standing up straight*). Thank you. (*Going.*)

LEONARD. Should I come across with you? I'm not afraid.

CLARA. I thank you as I would thank a snake that had entwined itself around me, and then left me of its own accord to follow other game. I know that I've been stung, and am only released because it doesn't seem worth while to suck the bit of marrow out of my bones. But I thank you in spite of it, for now I shall have a quiet death. Yes, it is no mockery! I thank you. I feel as if I had seen through your heart into the abyss of hell, and whatever may be my lot in the terrors of eternity, I shall have no more to do with *you*, and that's a comfort! And just as the unhappy creature bitten by a snake is not blamed for opening his veins in horror and disgust and letting his poisoned life well quickly away, so it may be that God of His grace will take pity on me when He sees you and what you've made of me. —If I had no *right* ever to do such a thing, how should I be *able* to do it?—One thing more: my father knows nothing of this, he doesn't suspect, and in order that he may never know, I shall leave this world to-night. If I thought that *you*—— (*Takes a step wildly towards him.*) But that's folly. Nothing could suit you better than to see them all stand and shake their heads and vainly ask why it happened!

LEONARD. Such things do happen. What's to be done? Clara!

CLARA. Away, away! He can speak! (*Going.*)

LEONARD. Do you think I believe you?

CLARA. No!

LEONARD. If you kill yourself, you kill your child, too.

CLARA. Rather both than kill my father! I know you can't amend sin with sin. But what I do now, comes on my head alone. If I put the knife in his hand, it affects him as well as me. *I* get it in any case. That gives me courage and strength in all my anguish. It'll go well with you on this earth. (*Goes out.*)

SCENE 5

LEONARD (*alone*). I must marry her! Yet why must I? She's going to do a mad trick to keep her father from doing a mad trick. What need is there for me to stop her by doing a madder trick still? I can't agree to it, not until I see the man before me who'll anticipate me by doing the maddest trick of all, and if he thinks as I do, there'll be no end to the business. That sounds quite clear,—and yet—I must go after her! There's some one at the door. Thank God! Nothing's worse than quarrelling with your own thoughts. A rebellion in your head, when you beget snake after snake and each one devours the other or bites off its tail, is the worst kind of all.

SCENE 6

SECRETARY (*enters*). Good-evening.

LEONARD. The secretary! To what do I owe the honour of——

SEC. You'll soon see, my boy.[1]

LEONARD. You're very familiar.[1] We *were* at school together, of course——

SEC. And perhaps we shall die together. (*Producing pistols.*) Do you know how to use these things?

LEONARD. I don't understand you.

SEC. (*cocks one*). Do you see? That is the way you do it. Then you aim at me, so, and fire.

LEONARD. What are you talking about?

[1] Using "du."

SEC. One of us two has got to die. Die! At once!

LEONARD. Die?

SEC. You know why.

LEONARD. By God, I don't.

SEC. Never mind. You'll remember when you breathe your last.

LEONARD. I haven't the faintest idea.

SEC. Now just come to your senses. Or else I might shoot you down for a mad dog that has bitten what is dearest to me, without knowing what I was doing;—as it is I've got to treat you as an equal for half an hour.

LEONARD. Don't talk so loud. If any one heard you——

SEC. If any one could hear, you'd have called out long ago. Well?

LEONARD. If it's on the girl's account, I can marry her. I'd half made up my mind to, when she was here.

SEC. She's been and gone again, without seeing you on your knees in remorse and contrition? Come! Come!

LEONARD. I beg you! I will do anything you wish. I'll get engaged to her to-night.

SEC. Either I do that or nobody. And if the world depended on it, you shan't touch the hem of her garment again. Come with me. Into the woods! Look here, I'll take you by the arm and if you make so much as a sound on the road, I'll—— (*raising a pistol*). Believe me. Anyhow we'll take the back way through the gardens, to keep you out of temptation.

LEONARD. One's mine; give it me.

SEC. So that you can throw it away and force me to let you run away, or murder you, what? Have patience till we get to the spot, then I'll divide squarely with you.

LEONARD (*accidentally knocks his glass off the table when going out*). Shall I never drink again?

SEC. Buck up, boy, you may come off all right. God and the devil are forever fighting for the world, it seems. Who knows which is master? (*Takes his arm; both go out.*)

Scene 7

Room in Anthony's *house. Evening.*

Karl (*enters*). No one at home! If I didn't know the rat-hole under the threshold where they keep the key, when they all go out, I wouldn't have been able to get in. Well, that wouldn't have mattered. I could run round the town twenty times and imagine there was no greater pleasure in the world than using your legs. Let's have a light. (*Lights up.*) The matches are just where they used to be, I'll bet, because in this house we've got twice ten commandments. "Put your hat on the third nail, not the fourth." "You must be sleepy at half-past nine." "You've no right to be chilly before Martinmas and no right to sweat after it." And that's on a level with "Thou shalt fear God and love Him." I'm thirsty. (*Calls.*) Mother! Phew! I'd forgotten she'd gone where there's no waiters to serve you. I didn't blubber in that gloomy cell when I heard them ringing the bell for her; but—you red-coat! You didn't let me have my last throw in the skittle-alley, although I'd the ball in my hand. I won't give you time to breathe your last, when I find you by yourself. And that may be to-night. I know where to find you at ten o'clock. And then off to sea! What keeps Clara out? I'm as hungry as I'm thirsty. To-day's Thursday. They've had veal broth. If it was winter, there'd have been cabbage; white cabbage up to Shrove Tuesday and green after. That's as certain as that Thursday comes after Wednesday and that it can't say to Friday, "Take my place, my feet are tired."

Scene 8

Clara *enters.*

Karl. At last! You shouldn't do so much kissing. Where four red lips get baked together, there's a bridge for the devil to cross. What have you got there?

CLARA. Where? What?

KARL. Where? What? In your hand.

CLARA. Nothing.

KARL. Nothing! Is it secrets? (*Snatches* LEONARD'S *letter from her.*) Give it to me! When your father's out, your brother's your guardian.

CLARA. I kept the thing in my hand, and yet the wind is so strong that it is blowing slates off the roofs. As I went past the church, one fell right at my feet. I nearly fell over it. "O God," I thought, "one more" —and stood still. It would have been so beautiful. They'd have buried me and said it was an accident. But I hoped in vain for a second.

KARL (*who has read the letter*). Damnation! I'll smash the arm of the man that wrote that. Fetch me a bottle of wine! Or is the money-box empty?

CLARA. There's one bottle left in the house. I bought it secretly and hid it for mother's birthday. It was to have been to-morrow—— (*Turns away.*)

KARL. Give it to me. [CLARA *brings the wine.*

KARL (*drinking quickly*). Now we might begin again —planing, sawing, and hammering, and then eating, drinking, and sleeping between-whiles to be able to go on planing and sawing and hammering. And a-bending of the knee on Sundays into the bargain: O God, I thank Thee for letting me plane and saw and hammer! (*Drinks.*) Long live every dog that doesn't bite on the chain! (*Drinks again.*) Here's to him again!

CLARA. Karl, don't drink so much. Father says there's the devil in wine.

KARL. And the parson says there's God in it. (*Drinks.*) We'll see who's right. The bailiff came here. How did he behave?

CLARA. He behaved as if he were in a thieves' den. Mother fell down and died the moment he opened his mouth.

KARL. Good! If you hear in the morning that he's been found dead, don't curse the murderer.

CLARA. But, Karl, you won't——

KARL. I'm not the only enemy he's got. He's been

attacked many a time. It would be no easy matter to spot the right man, unless he leaves his hat or his stick lying. (*Drinks.*) Whoever he is, I wish him luck.

CLARA. You're talking——

KARL. Don't you like the idea? Leave it alone, then. You won't see me for a long time again.

CLARA (*shuddering*). No.

KARL. No! Do you know already that I'm going to sea? Do my thoughts crawl on my forehead for you to read them? Or has the old man been raving in his usual fashion and threatening to lock me out? Bah! That would be much the same as if the warder had said to me —" You can't stay in prison any longer; I'll throw you out where you'll be free."

CLARA. You don't understand me.

KARL (*sings*).

> " The good ship puffs its sails, oh,
> And merrily blows the breeze."

Yes, truly, I'm not bound to the joiner's bench any longer. Mother's dead. There's nobody now who would stop eating fish after every storm. Besides, I've wanted it ever since I was a boy. Out into the world! I shall never get on here, or not until I have it proved to me that Fortune no longer favours the man that boldly risks his life, the man that throws away the copper he gets from the great treasury, to see whether she'll take it from him, or give it back to him gilded.

CLARA. And will you leave father alone? He's sixty now.

KARL. Alone? Aren't you staying with him?

CLARA. I?

KARL. Yes, you, his favourite! What nonsense have you got in your head that you ask such questions? I don't begrudge him his pleasure. He'll be freed from his eternal worry, when I go. So why shouldn't I? We simply don't suit each other. Things can't be too narrow for him. He'd like to clench his fist and creep inside of it. I'd like to burst my skin like baby's clothes, if I could! (*Sings.*)

" The anchor's lightly lifted,
The rudder's quickly shifted,
Away she flies with ease."

Tell me now, did he doubt my guilt for a moment? Didn't he comfort himself as usual with his overwise: " I expected it. I always thought as much. It had to come to that." If *you'd* done it, he'd have killed himself. I'd like to see him if you went the woman's way. He'd feel as if he was with child himself,—with the devil, too.

CLARA. Oh, how that tears my heart! I must go!

KARL. What do you mean?

CLARA. I must go into the kitchen—what else? (*Clutches at her brow.*) Yes, that's what I came home to do. (*Goes out.*)

KARL. She seems very queer! (*Sings.*)

" There comes a daring seabird
With greetings from the West."

CLARA (*comes in again*). The last thing's done now. Father's evening jug is by the fire. When I closed the kitchen door behind me and realised I should never go in again, I shivered to the very soul. So shall I leave this room, so this house, and so the world.

KARL (*sings, walking up and down.* CLARA *in background*). " The sun it flames down daily
And the little fishes gaily
Do sport around their guest."

CLARA. Why don't I do it then? Shall I never do it? Shall I put it off from day to day? Just as I'm putting it off now, from minute to minute—yes, away then, away! And yet I stay here. I feel as if hands were raised in my womb, as if eyes—— (*Sits down on a chair.*) What does this mean? Am I too weak to do it? Well, am I strong enough to see my father with his throat cut? (*Standing up.*) No! No!—Our Father, which art in Heaven—Hallowed be thy kingdom. O God, my poor head! I can't even pray. Karl! Karl! Help me!

KARL. What's wrong?

CLARA. The Lord's Prayer. (*Recollects.*) I felt as if I

was in the water and sinking, and had forgotten to pray. I— (*Suddenly.*) Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. That's it. Yes! Yes! Of course I forgive him. I'd forgotten all about him. Good-night, Karl.

KARL. Are you going to bed so early? Good-night!

CLARA (*like a child, going through the Lord's Prayer*). Forgive us——

KARL. You might get me a drink of water first—but it must be cold.

CLARA (*quickly*). I'll fetch it from the well.

KARL. Well, if you like; it isn't far.

CLARA. Thanks! Thanks! That was the only thing that troubled me. The deed itself was bound to betray me. Now they will say—" She's had an accident. She fell in."

KARL. Take care, though; they haven't nailed that plank on yet.

CLARA. Why, the moon's up! O God, I only come to save my father from coming. Forgive me as I—Be gracious, gracious—— (*Goes out.*)

SCENE 9

KARL (*sings*). " I'd spring into it gladly,
It's where I'd live and die."
Yes, but first— (*Looking at clock.*) What time is it? Nine. " I'm far from being hoary,
And travelling's my glory—
But whither? What care I? "

SCENE 10

ANTHONY (*enters*). I owed you an apology for something, but if I excuse you for making debts secretly, and pay them for you into the bargain, I may be let off.

KARL. The one's good and the other is unnecessary. If I sell my Sunday clothes I can satisfy the people myself, that want a few shillings from me. When I'm a sailor—(*aside*) there, it's out!—I shan't want them.

ANTHONY. What talk is this?

KARL. It's not the first time you've heard it, but say what you like, my mind's made up this time.

ANTHONY. Well, you're old enough, that's true.

KARL. Just because I'm old enough, I don't crow about it. But to my mind, fish and fowl shouldn't quarrel as to whether it's better in the air or in the water. One thing more. Either you'll never see me again, or you'll clap me on the shoulder and tell me I did right.

ANTHONY. We'll wait and see. I don't need to pay off the man I'd engaged to do your work. What more is there in it?

KARL. Thank you!

ANTHONY. Tell me. Did the bailiff really take you right through the town to the mayor's, instead of taking the shortest road?

KARL. Up street and down street, and over the market place, like a Shrove Tuesday ox. But take my word for it—I shall pay him out before I go.

ANTHONY. I can't blame you, but I forbid you to do it.

KARL. Ho!

ANTHONY. I won't let you out of my sight. If you tried to lay hands on him, I'd help the fellow myself.

KARL. I thought you, too, were fond of mother.

ANTHONY. I'll prove that I was.

SCENE II

SECRETARY. (*comes in weak and tottering, pressing a scarf to his breast*). Where's Clara? Thank God I came here again. Where is she? (*Sinks into a chair.*)

KARL. She went to— Why, isn't she back yet? Her talk—I am afraid—— (*Goes out.*)

SEC. She is avenged. The wretch lies—— But I too—— Why, O God! Now I can't——

ANTHONY. What's wrong? What's the matter with you?

SEC. It'll soon be over. Don't turn your daughter

out. Give me your hand on it. Do you hear? Don't turn her out, if she——

ANTHONY. This is strange talk. Why should I——? Oh, I'm beginning to see! Perhaps I wasn't unjust to her?

SEC. Give me your hand on it.

ANTHONY. No! (*Puts both hands in his pockets.*) But I'll stand out of her way. She knows that. I've told her so.

SEC. (*in horror*). You have — unhappy man, now I begin to understand you!

KARL (*rushes in.*) Father, father, there's some one in the well! If only it isn't——

ANTHONY. Bring the big ladder! Bring ropes and hooks! What are you tarrying for? Quick! Even if it's the bailiff!

KARL. Everything's there already. The neighbours were there before me. If only it isn't Clara!

ANTHONY. Clara? (*Clutching at a table.*)

KARL. She went to get some water, and they found her handkerchief.

SEC. Now I know why the bullet struck me. It is Clara.

ANTHONY. Go and see. (*Sits down.*) I can't. (KARL *goes out.*) And yet—— (*Stands up again.*) If I understand you properly (*to* SECRETARY) it's quite right.

KARL (*comes back*). Clara's dead. Her head's all broken in by the edge of the well, when she—— Father, she didn't fall in, she jumped in. A girl saw her.

ANTHONY. Let her think well before she speaks. It is too dark for her to have seen that for certain.

SEC. Do you doubt it? You'd like to, but you can't. Just think of what you said to her. You sent her out on the road to death, and I, I'm to blame that she didn't turn back. When you suspected her misfortune, you thought of the tongues that would hiss at it, but not of the worthlessness of the snakes that own them. You said things to her that drove her to despair. And I, instead of folding her in my arms, when she opened her heart to me in nameless terror, thought of the knave

that might mock at me, and——I made myself dependent on a man who was *worse* than I, and I'm paying for it with my life. And you, too, though you stand there like a rock, you too will say some day, "Daughter, I wish you had not spared me the head-shakes and shoulder-shruggings of the Pharisees; it humiliates me more, that you are not here to sit by my deathbed and wipe the sweat of anguish from my brow."

ANTHONY. She has spared me nothing. They saw her.

SEC. She did what she could. You were not worthy that she should succeed.

ANTHONY. Or she, perhaps! (*Noises without.*)

KARL. They're bringing her. (*Going.*)

ANTHONY (*standing immovable till the end, calls him back.*) Into the back room with her, where her mother lay.

SEC. I must go to meet her. (*Tries to get up and falls.*) Oh, Karl! (KARL *helps him out.*)

ANTHONY. I don't understand the world any more. (*Stands thinking.*)

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